The lived experiences of designing modules at one UK university: a qualitative account of academic practice

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the relatively under-researched experiences of module design of academics employed within one UK university. In all, 96 people responded to an initial e-questionnaire survey, and 23 of these participated in follow-up semi-structured interviews. The qualitative data collected from both sources is the main focus of discussion.

The thesis contextualises the research by presenting a brief description of the university of study and a sense of the social and political context of higher education in the few years preceding the onset of the project. Following this, there is a review of the existing literature around module and curriculum design. A separate chapter outlines the mixed methods employed to collect the data and the form of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) used to theme the qualitative data provided by the survey and interviews. The findings supported previous studies, but there was some contradictory data concerning assessment design, the value of the institutional approval procedures, and the usefulness of involving students in the design process.

This study found that, as a result of the effect of institutional processes and documents on design, the consequence of changing student profiles (particularly around assessment), and the obligation staff feel to their students (despite their expressed lack of available time and resources), module design (and redesign) is more situation-informed than evidence-informed. It concludes that module designers employ a realistic and pragmatic approach to the process, even when their views, attitudes, and consciences around the rights and wrongs of the design process are sometimes questioned.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 A brief overview of the research

This thesis explores the drivers (which can have both a positive and negative impact), strategies and practices of module design and redesign that emerged during the exploration of the design experiences of academic and academic-related staff employed within one UK University. In all, 96 members of staff (involved in the design of modules) participated in an e-questionnaire survey, and 23 members of staff participated in semi-structured interviews.

The project was conducted as a piece of insider exploratory research. I am a salaried academic who is both involved in module and programme design, and who is also employed within the institution that was researched.

As the researcher, I am also "*the researched"* (Fisher and Phelps 2006, p.10). My project was shaped not only by the way in which I managed it, but because I am also, as a practising academic, a part of it. Thus my project was influenced by my historical experiences, values and attitudes and these are articulated in the early chapters of this thesis.

Although the data discussed in Chapter 5 was produced by an online questionnaire and was more quantitative in nature, for the purpose of coherence and continuity and because the largest part of the data collection and analysis resulted from qualitative interviews, I have adopted a first person style of writing. My approach is not unique, as *"The use of a first person active voice in research presentation is now supported by ample precedent and theoretical debate"* (ibid. p.10).

This does not imply that my work is simply a reflection of my own experiences which have been supported by the accounts of my participants, as issues around personal epistemology and tacit knowledge are discussed in Chapters 2 and 4. However, it does mean that as I have exposed my own situation my "*personal investment in the research*" has to be acknowledged

because as Fisher and Phelps explained, this *"helped set the tone of reflexivity throughout my thesis"* (ibid. pp. 11-12).

1.2 Outputs from the thesis

Prior to the submission of this thesis, I submitted two manuscripts for publication within an academic journal. The content for these manuscripts was taken from draft material and in particular from Chapter 3 (The Literature Review), Chapter 4 (The Methodology), Chapter 5 (The Survey Data – a descriptive overview) and Chapter 6 (The Discussion of the Qualitative Data). Thus there is material within the journal articles that is also evident within the body of this thesis. However, the material of the thesis came first, and therefore the PhD research was the source for the journal articles. This point was acknowledged in the journal manuscripts.

The journal articles are:

> Binns, C. (2014) What can 'social-practice' theory and 'socio-cultural' theory contribute to our understanding of the processes of module design? *Journal of Further and Higher Education*. DOI: 10.1080 / 0309877X.2014.953462.
>
> Binns, C. (2016) Under pressure: an exploration of the module design experiences of academic staff employed in one UK university. *Journal of Further and Higher Education.* (Accepted).

In addition, and whilst writing up the thesis, I was awarded a book contract from Palgrave MacMillan which is based on the findings of this research. This more substantial manuscript has yet to be completed, but the proposed and provisionally accepted title is: *'Higher education module design in an era of change: academic identity, cognitive dissonance and institutional barriers'.*

1.3 How the project evolved

The idea for my research was conceived after I had completed an in-house Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education. One of the taught modules centred on the practice of using design models when reviewing or designing

module and programme curricula, and it focussed on the approach of constructive alignment which had been developed in the 1990s by John Biggs. Constructive alignment suggests that the method of assessment is considered once other elements (such as learning outcomes) have been addressed. However, through my own experiences and the observed module design practices of my colleagues, my intuitive assumption was that the teachings embraced within some of the educational literature didn't always happen in practice. In other words, other considerations often got in the way.

During the infancy of the project I had planned to collect three sources of data. This was because I had started to design an alternative model of module design to those in the existing literature. This model was more assessment-led, in that the consideration of assessment methods and design would be at the forefront of the design process, and therefore this would act as a driver in design. The basic idea for the original project was to test the proposed model on a small group of staff who were involved in module design and it was planned that an e-questionnaire and a small number of interviews would be used to elicit information concerning their experiences of module design. But it was also proposed that workshop data would be collected in the third stage of data collection as the aim of the research was, at this point, to further develop and evaluate the proposed design model mentioned above.

However, soon after the execution of the questionnaire survey, and about one third of the way through the follow-up interviews, it quickly became apparent that both the resulting quantitative and qualitative data was richer than had been originally anticipated.

As a result, and to avoid the problem of two projects being incorporated into one thesis (one on staff experiences of the design process and the other being staff responses to a proposed design model), I decided that the project should concentrate on academic experiences of (and approaches to) module design, as revealed through the data that had been collected from the questionnaires and interviews.

This did raise an issue as to whether or not a revised ethics application needed to be submitted, particularly as the interview data was not going to be used to inform the third stage of the original research plan. However, and following an examination of the emails inviting staff to take part, it was decided that participants had not been mis-led as there had been no mention of a suggested model in any of the project information that had been sent to prospective participants.

1.4 The aim of the project

By exploring the experiences of module design practice (rather than whole programme design, which is made up from a number of individual modules) of staff employed at one UK university, the overall aim of this thesis is to discover what the reported influences of module design are in that institution. This has a particular focus on the role that contemporary theoretical models play, and at what stage of the design process do academics and module designers deal with the assessment task. I was interested in what people told me, via their personal experiences, what they did and why they did it that way. In addition, I wanted to explore module design rather than whole programme or course design because my own experience suggested that module design (especially the tweaking of existing modules) was more of a personal activity than one that was executed by programme teams. In addition, it tended to be a more ad-hoc event, rather than one that is more rigidly planned. It was these personal, more institutionally unplanned experiences that I was interested in.

With this in mind, this project investigated one main research question:

> **What influences and drives academics when they are designing and redesigning modules?**

In addition, there were three sub-questions concerning approaches to module design, the relationship between contemporary design models and module design, and the consideration of the assessment in the design process.

1. Is the experience of module design and redesign an individual practice or is it more of a collaborative one?

2. What is the relationship between contemporary design models and module design and how much impact do they have on the process?

3. At what stage of the design process do academics and module leaders consider the assessment task for their modules (compared to the teachings of educational developers and theorists) and what factors influence this?

These questions are discussed in more depth in the literature review.

1.5 The structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 provides the reader with a brief description of the university in which the study took place, a sense of the social and political context of higher education in the few years preceding the onset of the project, and a brief outline of the ontological and theoretical positions adopted in the project. Following this, there is a review of the existing literature around module and curriculum design (see Chapter 3), and this embraces the theoretical underpinnings to the research, provides an overview of some of the curriculum design models that are in the literature and a discussion of related-research studies. This chapter also sets out the research questions and sub-questions that this thesis wishes to address. Having reviewed a number of published works and research studies that relate to the field, Chapter 3 also identifies gaps in the literature.

By using mixed methods (a questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews) within the context of insider research (see Chapter 4) the findings of the qualitative data are analysed by using a form of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and these are presented under thematic headings (see Chapter 6). IPA is useful when one is analysing data that embraces people's experiences of something (Reid et al. 2005). The questionnaire was a useful data collection tool as the responses provided an initial view into the experiences of staff involved in module design and

redesign (the quantitative questionnaire data is presented in Chapter 5) and they also helped to determine the format of the interview schedule that was used in the subsequent interviews.

The qualitative data produced from both the survey and the interviews is discussed against existing theory and other published work (see Chapter 6) and, following the treatment of a number of important findings, the thesis concludes (see chapter 7) that module designers employ a realistic and pragmatic approach to design, even when their views, attitudes and experiences around the rights and wrongs of the design process are sometimes questioned.

1.6 Relating this research to other studies in the field

Important work concerning the attitudes and practices of academics in the 1990s when the curriculum was changing to one of modularisation was conducted by Trowler (1998) and Henkel (2000). As a result, Trowler's idea concerning the importance of the deep-rooted attitudes and values that university staff use in their work practices was something that interested me, because my research was conducted during a period of significant social and economic change in higher education (see Chapter 2).

Theoretically, Bamber et al.'s (2009) book (of which Trowler is a co-author) on the role of socio-cultural theory in the enhancement and review of curricula is important. It suggests that the process of curriculum improvement is influenced by certain phenomena, which include attitudes, values, practices and individual identities. These ideas are discussed in Chapter 3. The ideas presented in this book are discussed in conjunction with the data produced by this research (see Chapter 6) and useful comparisons are made.

Mathieson's (2012) work concerning the work practices of university staff was also important as he suggested that whilst there were varying characteristics between different learning, teaching and assessment (LTA) cultures and

work-groups (or working teams), there was evidence of values, strategies and approaches to learning and teaching that were common across disciplinary boundaries between academics who were both delivering and designing curricula. Cultures existing in his institution were also associated with personal identities and individual historical contexts. This suggested that staff formed their own views despite their shared disciplinary knowledge, and I was interested in whether or not shared values, experiences and approaches towards module design were evident in my institution.

Finally, and in respect to the role of assessment in module design, Knight's (2002) idea that design could be assessment-led (what he means by this term is elaborated on in the literature review) supported one of his observed curriculum design strategies (rational planning). This was one of the springboards for my research as it appeared from Knight's work that the assessment design could be adapted to accommodate certain situations and contexts, such as where there were very large classes, but few resources such as available time for marking.

All of these published works impacted upon this project because first, they enabled me to place my research in the already established literature and second, they allowed me to see how my research could advance what was already known.

Thus it will be shown in the following section that this thesis contributes to existing knowledge by exploring the real-life experiences of module design and redesign (rather than programme design) in a changing era of higher education, and at a time where there are pressures upon staff, resources, time and the marketing of programmes. The novel attributes of this study are discussed next.

1.7 The contribution of this research to the field

Despite there being some published findings around the more general subject of curriculum design practice, there was still a question surrounding the concept of how university staff currently design and redesign their

modules *(rather than whole programmes)* and why they do it that way. In the university of focus, a module is an individual component which, alongside a collection of modules, makes up a whole programme. Some institutions might still refer to modules as 'units'.

This is an important project because university staff are designing and delivering module curricula, within the context of a programme, to a changing student audience who have differing expectations of higher education. Students are entering the sector from a wider range of educational backgrounds than before, there is an emphasis on the employability of the graduate, and institutions are acting on student feedback. This means that staff are having to review and redesign modules (and the programmes that are made up of them) in view of the changing audience that sits before them.

Listening to the experiences of fellow module designers was how I gained a better understanding of the real world experiences of staff who are employed within the institution in which I work.

My research is outlined, described and discussed in the following seven chapters and addresses the issues outlined above by exploring the module design practices of academic and academic-related staff in one UK university. This was made possible because both the questionnaire respondents and interviewees were forthcoming in their responses, and because they articulated detailed information and insight.

The practice of module design in higher education is an under-researched area, and this work has important implications for all academics that are involved in module design and redesign, as well as everyone who has to manage and/or support this process. It has already been explained that there are outputs from this research in the form of journal articles and a book contract. Feedback from the reviewers focussed on the importance and worth of the journals and proposed book content and indicated that this study was covering some new ground.

The next chapter discusses the context of the project and briefly describes the university in which this study took place.

Chapter 2: The Theoretical Context

2.1 Introduction

Writing in the context of the changing needs of "learners, employers and professional bodies", following the publication of the 2004 (published in 2006) Leitch Review of Skills, Beetham identified that *"These require rapid and responsive approaches to design ... Institutions are also under pressure to streamline processes and make general efficiencies. And in a time of economic difficulty, institutions need to deploy all available information to ensure their curriculum offerings recruit well, retain learners, and develop graduates with relevant capabilities"* (2009 section B).

She further noted that challenges facing institutions in redeveloping curricula included the treatment of a number of issues, including (ibid.section B):

1. widening participation
2. dealing with student numbers
3. enhancing employability
4. serving new learners
5. international students, distance learners, work-based learners
6. enhancing the student experience
7. enhancing student retention / progression
8. business and community engagement in the curriculum
9. integrating technologies across curriculum processes
10. developing efficient institutional processes
11. enhancing the role of assessment/feedback in the curriculum design.

In October 2010, just as this project was getting under way, the 'Browne Report' (Browne 2010) proposed a radical restructuring of higher education

by dramatically cutting central government funding for teaching and raising the cap on student fees. Commentators remarked that programme designers would have to review existing curricula so that universities could remain sustainable (Deloitte, 2010). Financial issues such as maintaining or increasing the incoming revenue attached to students then become a twelfth challenge.

In response to these challenges, and in the university in which this research took place, a number of institutional policies and initiatives have emerged. These have mostly been since 2012. For example there have been changes to the induction processes for all new students, the main campus has been developed to give a 'village' feel, the libraries have increased their opening hours, and there has been an increase in the amount and types of student support made available via specialised academic support units. There have also been significant reforms in terms of new programmes and the withdrawal of courses which have poorly recruited. In addition, module and programme leaders are more accountable via formal annual evaluations of modules and programmes and surveys such as the National Student Survey (NSS) for student progression, teaching methods, curricula content, academic support and the feedback received from external examiners and students.

2.2 Questions of ontology

As a salaried lecturer who is involved in module and programme design, review and redesign (my professional position is further outlined in section 4.2) my own propositional thoughts, ability, experiences, observations and posteriori knowledge suggested that academic practice is more of an individual activity and is not one that is always shared. In addition, my own experiences of module design can be pragmatic and are sometimes based on what is essential to do the task, especially when faced with unexpected resource issues, such as when designing a module for which there is no designated member of staff. Over the years I have changed my practices in

order to respond to the evolving requirements of the job, many of which are outlined by Beetham (see section 2.1 above).

Based upon my own working practices, and those that I had observed of my colleagues, I took the idiographic view that module design is mainly constituted of individual strategies and processes for which one does not necessarily refer to a textbook. It is a rational phenomenon based on prior experience, historical practices and the occasional input from colleagues. Thus my working hypothesis was that people would respond to module design according to their own context.

My observations as a practitioner also steered my gut instinct and visceral view towards the idea that design models do not significantly impact on module design practice, as other factors are more important. At the time of working on this thesis there was little recent commentary to either discredit or confirm my initial ideas around module and curriculum design.

I had adopted my approach from the ontological position of a critical realist by asking if there is such a thing as curriculum design. I came to the conclusion that it does exist; it is a collection of experiences, an event that is external to us, and that we mostly agree what it is. Through epistemology we individually engage with it and we have individual perceptions that affect our conceptualisation of it to some extent.

The next chapter (The Literature Review) will show that previous research and development projects concerning curriculum design have revealed initial insights which bring to mind the philosophical approaches related to ‘constructionism’, whereby “t*ruth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world ...”* (Crotty 1998, p.42) and this coheres with a critical realist position. Epistemologically, therefore, my own and other people's interactions, their practices, thoughts and understandings are a kind of constructed knowledge that people create (and continually re-create or review) and build upon collectively through work. This is an interesting concept.

Discussions of knowledge being *"at least in part a product of human thought"* (Burr 2003, p.12) have been developing over many years. As a result, and over time, social constructionism has developed into a number of philosophical approaches by which people can *"develop subjective meanings of their experiences"* (Creswell 2007, p.20). It embraces concepts such as Activity Theory and Situated Learning Theory. Activity Theory in a work context concerns *"... collective work activity, with the basic purpose shared by others (community), is undertaken by people (subjects) who are motivated by a purpose or towards the solution of a problem (object), which is mediated by tools and/or signs (artefacts or instruments) used in order to achieve the goal (outcome). The activity is constrained by cultural factors including conventions (rules) and social organisation (division of labour) within the immediate context and framed by broader social patterns (of production, consumption, distribution and exchange)"* (Warwick.ac.uk 2015).

In Situated Learning Theory *"... situated learning is learning that takes place in the same context in which it is applied ... a social process whereby knowledge is co-constructed ... such learning is situated in a specific context and embedded within a particular social and physical environment ... a community of practice"* (ibid, 2015).

We will return to these concepts in the literature review when the work of Paul Trowler (Activity Theory) and Lave and Wenger (Situated Learning Theory) are explored.

As previously suggested, one of the objectives of social constructionism is to discover the means by which individuals and groups involve themselves in the construction of what they perceive to be the reality of something. In this research this would be the practice of curriculum and module design and redesign. Indeed Gergen (1985) has advocated that a social construct is something that seems obvious to those who possess it, in that it is a creation of a particular group. Social constructionism is closely linked to the epistemological concept of interpretivism (Creswell 2007). In this project, people's experiences of the module design and redesign, their execution of

practice and their personal interactions are interpreted to discover what gives meaning to the concept, what drives their approaches and what creates their reality. The construct can also be described as *"a concept or practice that is the construct (or artefact of) a particular group"* (AECT 2011). Blaikie (1993) (cited in Crotty 1998, p.56) has asserted that group members *"develop meanings for their activities together. In short, the social world is already interpreted before the social scientist arrives"*. Despite the last phrase including the words 'social scientist', social constructionists actually reject a number of fundamental characteristics of traditional 'scientific' methods. As Robson suggests, *"Within this tradition there is almost invariably a rejection of the view that 'truths' about the social world can be established by using natural science method …* (2002, p.4). Rather, there is an acceptance of the idea that individuals attach meaning to what is happening about them (ibid. p.24) and this thesis explores the experiences and the meanings and implications of them, as expressed by the participants of this study.

Thus social constructionism advocates that what is accepted to be 'knowledge and truth' is simply the result of our own perspective, as our own experiences shape our perceptions of a range of social worlds. However, my research did not look at the social world in general. Rather, it investigated one particular social world within one particular place and the experiences of those who work within it, and that was the experiences of staff who design and redesign modules within one UK university.

2.3 Issues around truth

Whilst I am a module designer, the data that I obtained from my participants was accepted as their truth at that moment in time. Although I hadn't approached this project using the philosophical theory of modern coherentism (which concerns the theory of justification rather than truth), the experiences conveyed by the respondents and interviewees were mutually supportive and that represented a degree of holistic justification. This view is supported by Elgin (2005) when she argues that views should be mutually consistent and supportive. Social constructionism concerns people's

experiences of something that is personally mediated. In research projects that embrace social constructionism, truths do not require external or objective validation. As a practitioner my independent grounds were based on my own experiences and observations of curriculum design practice – in other words what I see and hear. However, I didn't need the data of my participants to be justifiable, plausible or warranted as one element of insider research, and of interpretive analysis, is that you have to suspend your own views of the phenomenon being explored at that point in time. Thus in the spirit of the research I accepted the truth value of what my questionnaire respondents and interviewees said, as it was not my responsibility to gauge if they were telling me the truth.

O'Brien, when discussing the work of Reid, argues that *"we should always accept someone's testimony unless we have good reason to suspect that a particular report is false … The default position is one of trust … we believe what people say unless we have good reason not to"* (O'Brien 2006, p.55). This acceptance of the data that you are given is the principle of charity, and it was the approach that I took, although I was always interpretive and open minded when analysing it. For example I had suspected that current module design and redesign might vary between different disciplines. As someone with more of a social science background, I took the view that I would accept whatever I was told about practices and experiences that occurred within other subject disciplines (and sometimes my own) even if they were contrary to my own experiences. As it happens, it later transpired that I interviewed at least two people from each academic school within the university and that the interviewees, by giving quite similar responses to the interview questions, informally triangulated what the other participants had said. Thus there were commonalities in what people said (and the language in which they conveyed it) which supported a common experience.

Before discussing the social and political context of higher education within the period in which this project was executed, the next section briefly outlines, in as far as the issue of retaining anonymity will allow, the university that was the focus of this research.

2.4 Situating the institution

The institution that employs the staff who were included in this project was granted university status in the 1960s. In 2014, the student population comprised just over 10,000 undergraduates and approximately 3,000 postgraduate students. The university is multicultural and attracts students and staff from a diverse range of countries. There is a large culture of academic research, but it is a more teaching-intensive university. A large number of the programmes on offer are professionally validated.

At the time that the research was conducted (2012-13), the university was divided into seven academic schools which each embrace a broad range of specialist subjects, vocational courses and professionally validated programmes. There have been changes to the structure and forward planning of the university but this thesis embraces the position of the university at that point in time.

The institution is responsive to employers' needs and requirements and as such is ranked very highly in both the local and national league tables for graduate employment. However, it is not a Russell Group university, and in 2013 it was placed in the lowest quartile from 119 institutions in The Guardian newspaper ranking of universities (www.theguardian.com), and in the third quartile from 123 in the 2014 Complete University Guide published by the Department for Business Innovations and Skills.

2.5 Setting the scene: the social, political and economic context of higher education at the time that this research was executed

There has been a period of significant change and transformation within UK universities and higher education since the mid-1980s. From what was once considered to be an elite form of education for the privileged few, going to university is now seen to be something that is more ubiquitous (Shelley and Vinck (1995). Not only has there been an increase in the number of undergraduates attending universities, but there has also been an increase in the number of institutions providing higher education programmes. For

example, in the 1960s there were just over 400,000 undergraduate students within UK higher education institutions, whilst in the year 2000 there were over a million (Greenaway and Haynes 2003, p.150). More recently (2013/14) the total number of higher education institution enrolments totalled 2,340,275 (HESA 2014).

From my own experience, and that of Hemera (2014), this expansion of the higher education system has resulted in bigger classes and students with more diverse backgrounds and educational experiences than in previous years. This has meant that I teach in classes with up to 200 students compared with 30-40 in previous years. For some colleagues that I know, this number increases to approximately 400. This phenomenon has impacted on the availability of staff time to be able to foster the staff-student relationship and it has also impacted on staff and institutional resources such as timetabling, the availability of suitable classrooms and library stock.

Twenty years ago commentators such as Bradley (1994, p.13) were predicting that for now and the future *"... university staff and students need accommodation, library resources and laboratory equipment. Everyone needs time, a commodity that is being squeezed out of the system by the increasing bureaucratic and financial demands imposed by government education policies"*. The issue of time, or the lack of it, was something that I had experienced, and indeed I am continuing to experience. In fact, in order to complete this thesis I opted for a 0.5 employment contract (rather than a full-time one) as the feeling that I was having to keep five or six plates spinning consecutively meant that I would have found it very difficult to undertake doctoral research as well. There is always something else to do, whether it be administration, teaching, tutoring, meetings or university marketing days to attend.

Although the practice of admitting students with less than the advertised UCAS admission tariff is not new, there has been a bid to increase the numbers of students entering higher education. In addition, there have been conflating issues such as the impact of developments in technology, and the

changes in higher education teaching culture, as more innovative forms of teaching have developed away from the 'sage on the stage' standing in front of the chalk face, to more on-line and less didactic methods of delivery.

These issues, along with sector recommendations such as those contained in the Enterprise in Higher Education Initiatives of the 1980s and the 1997 Dearing Reports, in addition to the changing profiles of students and their corresponding skill-sets, has prompted a revision of curricula, and in particular methods of assessment. Indeed the current economic climate, which has resulted in a shortage of available graduate jobs, has meant that programmes have increasingly been encouraged to implement elements of employability into the curriculum. In addition, the withdrawal of the fee-funding and maintenance grants from 1990 onwards, and the introduction of the repayable loans (from 2012) has meant that many undergraduates have to self-fund tuition fees of up to £9,000 per year.

The context of higher education is a different environment to what it was ten, five, or even two years ago, and it is likely that the environment will change further. Academic staff are receiving different signals from students, the institution, external stakeholders, and future employers. More than ever, degree programmes and the modules within them need to be marketable, sustainable, attractive and academically challenging. Modules that might have once been taught over 24 weeks, with a class of 30 students, are sometimes now being taught over 12 weeks with a class of 200. This is a challenge for staff, and this was the mood of the university of focus at the time that this research took place. This study is not a discussion of the teaching and learning initiatives of the 1980s; it is more about the experiences of module designers in a changing context of higher education. Thus the question of what drives staff to design and redesign their modules and the way in which they do it is what this project is about.

The process of developing the first stage of this research, which involved executing the literature search, is addressed next.

Chapter 3: The Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

To briefly recap what has been already set out in the introduction, the aim of this research is to explore the module design experiences of staff employed at one UK university with a particular focus on how university staff currently design and redesign their modules and why they do it that way.

Following a brief overview of how this review was executed, this chapter introduces the gap in the literature that I intended to fill. The chapter then provides an overview of some published models/approaches of curriculum design by presenting four examples that, via in-house training or by reading contemporary educational literature, practitioners within the chosen university might have been exposed to. Following this, there is a discussion of the relationship between the practice of curriculum design and assessment consideration, and how this discussion sits with the overall aim of the research. A section concerning influences on module design and redesign follows, which itself is followed by a discussion of further influences on curriculum design as perceived and evidenced by publications within the field.

3.2 The literature search and the search strategy

The search strategy focussed on two initial questions. These were devised before formulating the research questions and the overall aim of the project:

- What do academics and module leaders actually do when designing and redesigning their modules, and how do they do it?
- In consideration of the contemporary literature and the curriculum design models discussed within it, do academics adhere to the design practices suggested within them or do they use alternative approaches?

A list of the search terms used to initially engage in the literature search is provided in Table 1, and these were used as a springboard for setting the research context, for establishing the key issues to be addressed and explored, and for ensuring that the thesis did not replicate what has already been done (Cohen et al. 2011, p.112). By using the 'Google Scholar' website as an initial search tool, I was able to locate previous projects, published papers and other academic work that embraced curriculum design practice in higher education.

The search was useful in that as it evolved, it identified existing theoretical and empirical research that defined key terms, methodologies, constraints and concepts used in similar research. Having been revisited over the course of five years the search became more refined, and it resulted in an eclectic mix of UK, overseas and discipline-based sources. There was a misconception at the viva voce examination that only Google Scholar had been used, but additional databases were used, for example the ‘Society for Research into Higher Education’ (SRHE) database of ‘Research into Higher Education Abstracts’ was checked every four months up to the point of first submission of the thesis. Nevertheless, a post-viva search was conducted using ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) by using the original search terms outlined above, which identified three useful papers. These have been incorporated into the thesis where appropriate and are listed in the References as Norton (2013), Roberts (2015) and Burrell et al. (2015). The latter was published after this thesis had been submitted to the printer. In terms of this thesis, their significance was in making a contribution to the discussion of the qualitative data presented in chapter six.

As such, this literature review sets up the context of the thesis, although Chapter 6 also draws upon peer-reviewed literature that addresses further perspectives that emerged during the analysis of the qualitative data. This literature was not used to formulate the research questions, but it was employed in the addressing of them.

Table 1: List of search terms used in the initial stage of the project

Curriculum	
Curriculum models	Curriculum design not primary
Curriculum design and higher education	Curriculum design and university
Curriculum design and models	Curriculum design and models not primary
Curriculum design and models and higher education	
Curriculum design and models and university	
Curriculum change and higher education	Curriculum change and university
Curriculum enhancement and higher education	
Curriculum enhancement and university	
Curriculum review and higher education	
Curriculum review and university	
Drivers for curriculum change	Reasons for curriculum change
Designing modules	
Module design	Module design and higher education
Module design and university	Module change
Module and enhancement	Module review
Module design practice and university	
Module design practice and higher education	
Drivers	
Drivers and change	Drivers and change and module
Drivers and enhancement	Drivers and enhancement and module
Assessment	
Assessment and higher education	Assessment and university
Assessment led	Role of assessment and university
Role of assessment and higher education	
Consideration and assessment and higher education	
Consideration and assessment and university	

Much of the work written before 1989 was disregarded despite the fact that the concept of curriculum design has been researched and discussed since the 1940s. This was because the earlier literature was written in a different era of higher education when, as identified in Chapter 2, a lower percentage of the population attended university. This was not grounds for dismissing it,

as I did read it, but I felt that discussions around design and review had moved on since 1990, and it was the later literature, and the findings within it, that I would be comparing my own research to. Some publications had discussed design models used in practice before 1990, such as Malan (2000) and Prideaux (2003), but these older models have not been included in this thesis, as more emphasis has been placed on four models/approaches which are more generally cited in the more contemporary literature and the in-house training provided by the university studied in this project. Literature concerning the practice of programme, as opposed to module design, dominated the findings but papers evaluating both past and present curriculum design models were also provided a common theme.

More recently, there have been a number of publications concerning curriculum design, particularly around the enhancement and review of a curricula (for example Anderson (2011), Bamber et al. (2009), Coria et al. (2010), Lueddeke (2010)). One major project was the JISC 'Institutional Approaches to Curriculum Design Programme', and the development of its 'Curriculum Lifecycle' model, which ran from September 2008 until August 2012. JISC is a registered charity (formerly known as Joint Information Systems Committee) that works on behalf of UK further and higher education to support the use of digital technologies (JISC 2009).

Before discussing some of the curriculum design models, the relationship between them, and consideration of the assessment, the concept of 'curriculum' is addressed next.

3.3 What is a curriculum?

The word curriculum is rooted in Latin, having originally meant *"track or racecourse"* (Prideaux 2003, p.268). This definition evolved into a *"course of study or syllabus"*, and more recently, the word has been defined to embrace the wider *"planned learning experiences in an educational institution"* (ibid. p.268). Lueddeke (2010, p.24), on the other hand, suggests that *"the curriculum refers to both the process and substance of an educational*

programme … and includes what our students are becoming". Both authors appear to be writing about the broader educational context in their definitions of what a curriculum is, but their papers focus on issues in higher education.

Fearon (2008) concentrates solely on the higher education curriculum and chooses two defining examples to draw on in order to present his personal and reflective view. He draws on the work of Tanner (1975) in stating that *"a curriculum is an attempt to communicate the essential principles and features of an educational proposal in such a form that it is open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice"* (Fearon 2008, p.188) and *"curriculum is the totality of learning experiences provided to students so that they can attain general skills and knowledge at a variety of learning sites"* (Marsh 2004, cited in Fearon 2008, p.188). Indeed Prideaux suggests that the curriculum *"exists at three levels: what is planned for the students, what is delivered to the students and what the students experience"* (2003, p.268). Integral to these three levels are four elements: *"content; teaching and learning strategies; assessment processes; and evaluation processes"* (ibid. p.268).

Through her own observations, Toohey identifies that a curriculum (which in her research relates to whole programmes or courses rather than individual modules) is something where the *"tutor selects and transmits information … the content is structured by the logic of the discipline"* and *"the learning goals have a broad knowledge of the field"* and *"assessment is used to confirm the extent and knowledge and to rank students"* (1999, p.50).

More contemporary definitions of a curriculum suggest that *"Instead of starting with the building blocks of a syllabus or discipline content ... we should begin by focussing upon the learner and how they learn. This approach turns the traditional curriculum design model on its head, and redefines curriculum as about process rather than product"* (University of West Scotland 2013). This is an important distinction which relates to people's experiences of design – something that underpinned the purpose of this project. Furthermore, the JISC 'Institutional Approaches to Curriculum

Design' (2010b, unpaged) project, when referring to the definition of a higher education curriculum stated that *"It could be said to answer the questions 'What needs to be learned?' 'What resources will this require?' and 'How will this be assessed'?"* From my own experiences as a module and curriculum designer, these are the questions that I ask myself when enhancing or designing modules and therefore this definition resonated with my own views.

In addition to the above, Fearon (2008) also considers the aims of developing a curriculum. Having defined what the term means for him, he considers what a curriculum tries to achieve. Fearon states that *"in the first place, a curriculum should meet the needs, aspirations and personal growth of an individual i.e. social and economic (the workplace) needs"* (ibid. p.188). In addition, he suggests that *"a curriculum should encourage the student to develop themselves through 'independent learning' … This should be in addition to the key skills and knowledge we teach them but does rely on the student's own self-motivation"* (ibid. p.188).

Based on an analysis of the literature presented above, the definition of a curriculum can vary. This depends on the context of understanding the term, whether that be in an institutional or a personal context or it can be a set of documents. In addition, it can be a plan for teaching and learning. This would depend on whether a curriculum focuses on the learner, their learning experience and the skills and knowledge to be learned, or if it centres on the experiences of the facilitator or designer.

The paper by Fearon (2008) is essentially, as mentioned above, a reflective piece concerning the development not only of a professionally validated undergraduate curriculum but also, and as a new academic, of himself. Rather than focussing entirely on the curriculum design process, it concerns the maturation and improvement of modules and courses. In other words, it suggests that curriculum design is an on-going practice. The process of design does not stop once a new module has been created and approved, as module content is periodically reviewed and changed (which is known colloquially in my institution as tweaking). Therefore, curriculum development

in higher education is an act of design as it is part of the design experience. To illustrate design practice, Fearon's paper also incorporates the experiences of someone who has been influenced by the learning, teaching and assessment (LTA) literature, which in Fearon's case, was via a compulsory ‘new academics’ teaching programme. This is partly what this thesis is all about – the discovery of what really goes on in the practice and process of module design and redesign. In other words what are the influences and drivers of a module designer? Do academics employ approaches suggested by educational developers and theorists or are there other processes involved? These questions are important, and in turn influenced my own research questions, because no matter how celebrated curriculum design models and educational theories are, they are inert if they are not being used, and especially if other influences on design and redesign are more influential. The next section considers the process of curriculum design itself.

3.4 What is curriculum design and how are curricula designed?

For the purpose of this research, the word 'curriculum' is applied to modules (i.e. the individual modular components which make up a whole course programme) and the design of them.

Beetham's (2009) summary of the curriculum design process asserts that it “... *leads to the production of core/programme/module documents such as a definitive course/module description, validation documents, prospectus entry, and course handbook. This involves consideration of resource allocation, marketing of the course, and learners' final outcomes and destinations, as well as general learning and teaching requirements. A concern with quality imbues every aspect of the design/development life-cycle, which requires academic scrutiny both internally and externally, opportunities for review, revision and discussion, mapping to a range of relevant professional or subject benchmarks and standards, and the involvement of a number of internal and external agencies with a remit for academic quality”* (section A).

This quote is relevant to this thesis as it demonstrates that the task of module design (which is creating new curricula) as against the task of module review and redesign (which enhances and improves post-germination) requires a lot of consideration, and that there would be plenty to be addressed when this project entered its data collection phase. For example questions would need to investigate both the initial phases of design experience as well as those which embrace the review and redesign of existing curricula.

One way of navigating the design process is to use a curriculum design model. It is proposed later in this chapter that many curriculum design models are generally prescriptive in nature, as they provide rational routes for designers to follow. However, it is acknowledged that educational theorists and authors such as Toohey (1999) and Moon (2002) do not assume that they will be used in a rational way, as the models are simply presented and it is up to the reader to use them or not in whatever ways they choose.

Some more personal accounts reflect the process of curriculum design. For example Fearon discloses that by his experiences *"I have learnt that a good starting point for the writing of a new module descriptor is the 'learning outcomes'* [and that] *"we also need to concentrate on aligning our teaching methods to the learning outcomes and methods of assessment"* (2008, p.193). He discusses his approach further, but his personal experiences of his approach to design suggest that, for him, several factors (such as individual, institutional, educational and social influences) impact upon curriculum design (ibid. p.189). Like some of the work mentioned previously, he concludes that the process is *"very much a 'balancing act whereby students' educational requirements need to be met whilst still considering professional body requirements and the availability of resources"* (ibid. p.193). Nevertheless, Fearon's account of his approach to design is useful as it explores the practice of curriculum design – not only 'out there' but 'in here', in other words as expressions of his own experiences. This is an important point because it cannot be assumed that people follow the same process as their institutional colleagues. What is right for one person may not be practical, or even possible, for another. Indeed, Bamber et al. state that

whilst there is an assumption that *"people on the ground will act in 'logical' ways ... this …view of behaviour just does not stand up to scrutiny in University contexts"* (2009, p.9). Interestingly, when discussing the process of design, Shaw and Jackson also acknowledge that *"in reality the process is complex, more iterative and messier than portrayed … the decisions that have to be made by curriculum designers are not made in … an idealistic vacuum"* (2002, p.2). These comments were one of the springboards for this project.

The idea that the experiences and practices of curriculum and module design and redesign might not be consistent (even within the same university) was something that a few of the projects from the JISC 'Institutional Approaches to Curriculum Design Programme' venture had observed (2010a). For example the Open University's 'Open University Learning Design Initiative' (OULDI) project referred to this as *"the gap between the formalised design processes and the often informal process of design"* (OULDI 2009a, section 7). The University of Ulster's 'Viewpoints' project (2009) also found that curriculum design is an on-going endeavour which can be driven by various agendas including personal and institutional. Before the advent of their project, curriculum design was typically *"supported in an ad-hoc fashion, placing huge responsibilities on teaching and support staff"* (University of Ulster Viewpoints 2012, pp.5-6). By talking to academic staff about how they approached programme and module design, the University of Strathclyde 'Principles in Patterns' (PiP) project found that *"design practices are not currently co-ordinated … and much design activity … is tacit and undocumented … it is extremely difficult to uncover all of the influences, institutional or otherwise, that determine the shape of tasks, modules and programmes … and the design process"* (2010, section 4.1).

Clearly, the process of curriculum design is not something that can be pigeon-holed, and this insight helped to influence the research questions asked in this project, as I wanted to know to what extent (or not) practitioners make sense of it all and how they actually undertake the activity. As a practising academic in both module and programme design and redesign, I

knew that, within my institution, the majority of module designers are exposed to contemporary design models and educational concepts during the course of their work. This can be via formal in-house training programmes, more informally through team meetings, by engaging with the institutional guidelines, or more subtly by using the institutional design tools that academics are required to engage with in module design (this observation is discussed further at a later point in this chapter).

In view of this, four models/approaches of curriculum design were evaluated. These four models were chosen because:

1. Staff (from some of whom I would be collecting data) who *had* attended the in-house Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education (PGCHE), would have been exposed at some point to these models (I knew this because I had attended the course but I was also aware that not everyone would have);

2. Staff who *had not* attended the above course may still have been influenced by these models if they read any educational literature referring to them, In addition the concepts put forward by these models may have permeated team meetings, and will have underpinned any institutional design workshops;

3. At the time that the data had been collected (2012) the concept of constructive alignment passively influenced the design process at the university of focus. For example, the institutional guidance template used to design modules (known internally as the 'module descriptor') is itself constructively aligned. Thus whether or not staff have been exposed to models of constructive alignment, there is an institutional tool that scaffolds it;

4. The four models situate the design of the assessment at the end of the design process (a phenomenon which is explored by this research).

It should also be noted that by the time this thesis was being written up (2014) the university of focus was favouring and adopting programme design

strategies that embraced the concept of threshold concepts and this approach was reflected in the institutional in-house courses that were available for academic staff (particularly programme designers) to attend. Threshold concepts are employed to promote the understanding of a discipline (Meyer and Land 2003) but, because they were not being discussed so widely within the institution when the data for this project was being collected, a review of threshold concepts has not been included in this thesis.

Thus the next section concentrates on four curriculum design models which, as stated above, were referred to and/or discussed within the university's in-house training programmes both for some years before and at the time that the data was collected.

3.4.1 Four curriculum models – a discussion

The four models that were selected for discussion were those that are associated with John Biggs, Susan Toohey, Jenny Moon and Malcolm Shaw/ Norman Jackson.

3.4.1.1 Biggs' model of constructive alignment

Biggs and Tang's book (2011) focuses on promoting the model of 'constructive alignment' originally devised by Biggs in the 1990s. The model can be employed at both the institutional and classroom level and uses constructivist theory to suggest that learners use their own endeavours (or activities) to construct knowledge. It promotes the idea that the expected learning standards (or intended learning outcomes) are both central to the concept (ibid. p.60) and are also stated up-front. Teaching is designed to meet these learning standards (ibid. p.54) - a concept that JISC (2010b) also put forward when defining what a curriculum is (see section 3.3).

In this model, learning outcomes are expressed in terms of which constructive activities (which Biggs calls 'verbs') would be most likely to achieve them. The model can be used for individual modules and whole programme design. The learning activity facilitates the achievement of the

outcomes and the ‘assessment’ measures how well the intended outcomes have been achieved (Biggs and Tang 2011). Biggs and Tang suggest that in designing a constructively aligned curriculum, assessment is determined after everything else (see Figure 1).

On first impression the model does not come across as linear, however the explanatory text describing the process of constructive alignment (pp. 54-55 and p.60) does imply a linear approach because each stage of the model is considered prior to addressing the next one. Thus the stages are aligned separately, rather than in tandem with each other.

Cohen (1987), cited in Boud and Falkichov (2007, p.87), argues that *“in order to make new learning environments effective, the ‘constructive alignment' ... between the learning environments, characteristics and the assessment is a ‘magic bullet’ in improving learning”*. Furthermore, Dochy et al. (1997)

Figure 1: Model of Constructive Alignment (this has been removed as permission to reproduce was not obtained).

Source: Taken from Biggs and Tang (2011, p.59)

suggest that this alignment might significantly increase the power of assessment as a stimulus and a tool for learning (cited in Boud and Falkichov 2007, p.87). One commentator has suggested that the model adopts a backward facing approach, as it *"works from outcomes to the other elements (content; teaching and learning experiences; assessment; and evaluation)"* (Prideaux 2003, p.270). This is not a criticism; rather it is descriptive observation of how the model is developed by Biggs which confirms the idea that the expected learning standards (or intended learning outcomes) are fundamental to the model.

3.4.1.2 Toohey's (1999) book

Toohey's book takes a different approach to course design and what she calls 'units of study' design in that her analytical framework suggests that *"the most accurate picture of educational values in a course are not usually found in statements of goals (or learning outcomes), but the way time is allocated to different topics, learning activities and the nature of assessment"* (1999, p.49). Her use of the word 'course' relates to whole programmes or short courses rather than individual modules (ibid. pp.22-24) but her book employs a more philosophical approach towards curriculum design based on values, beliefs and ideologies which might indicate what curriculum design means to Toohey. The book is aimed at academic teachers, and within the text Toohey refers to political, social and economic factors which have impacted on higher education. Following a critique of other design models she offers constructed explanations of variations in curriculum design practice and presents what she calls a typical prescriptive six-stage linear design model (based on other people's work) that positions in diagram form, assessment towards the back end (ibid. p.21) (see Figure 2). Nevertheless, she concludes that *"the course design process, at least in its initial stages, does not usually consist of a series of sequential steps, but a group of parallel processes"* (ibid. p.26). However, Toohey doesn't make any assumptions that models are or should be used, as it is up the reader to use them if and when appropriate. By elaborating on this aspect of design, it is her 'five fundamental approaches to course design' (Discipline based, Performance based, Cognitive, Experiential, or Socially Critical) that is the most interesting

Figure 2: A typical model of the course design process (this has been removed as permission to reproduce was not obtained).

Source: Taken from Toohey (1999, p.2)

part of the book. Whilst this section of her book isn't about her model, it does concern her analysis of how curricula are developed (which can sometimes be in a piecemeal fashion) and this has been discussed in section 3.3.

In proposing a course design process, Toohey observes that models do not necessarily work; they are at best frameworks and are therefore not hard and fast structures. Indeed she suggests that the 'discipline' approach dictates that the *"choice of course content is not made strictly on the relevance of the programme and potential usefulness to the student or practitioner, but on the faculty's beliefs about what is appropriate"* (ibid. p.45) which can be influenced by other factors, but not by a model.

Whilst she focuses on whole courses, Toohey considers six fundamental questions of programme design including the role of teachers, what is expected of students, which learning objectives are worthwhile, and what purpose assessment should serve and in what form (ibid. p.49). She identifies that a central question is *"What is most important for these students to know and what might be the best ways for them to learn it?"* (ibid. p.46) and this sits with Biggs and Tang's approach (and also with that of threshold concepts).

3.4.1.3 Moon's 'map of module development'

A review of Moon's (2002) map of module development reveals that it differs from the models discussed above as it employs a semi-cyclical process (see Figure 3). On first impression, this is less linear in its approach but like Biggs and Tang (2011), Moon's work is learner-centred and uses an outcomes-based approach based upon what the student can do as a result of their study at a particular level. Moon's work is theoretically located in the idea that *"the use of level descriptors along with the learning outcomes puts the focus on learning"* and that *"no longer is the focus of concern with the complexity of input (teaching) but it is on the complexity of output"* (2002, p.32).

Figure 3: Moon's map of module development (this has been removed as permission to reproduce was not obtained).

Source**:** Taken from Moon (2002, p.16)

The most significant feature of the map is its attention to levels of learning and the place of 'level descriptors' in curriculum design. This was not an entirely new concept as the idea of using 'levels' in curriculum design formed an integral part of Malans', Jorissens' and Kachelhoffers' model (cited in Malan 2000, p.24). Indeed level descriptors were originally developed for 'accreditation' in higher education and determine *"what a learner is expected to achieve at the end of a level of study"* (Moon, 2002, p.16). They are *"hierarchical stages that represent increasingly challenging learning to a learner"* (ibid. p.16) as opposed to learning outcomes, which are *"statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand, or be able to do at the end of a module and of how learning will be demonstrated"* (ibid. p.17).

Interestingly and, despite her attempts to break away from the linear model of curriculum design, Moon's consideration of assessment methods is situated after writing the learning outcomes. However, she does concede that her method is not necessarily the way that people design modules (ibid. p.15) and also suggests that her approach should simply be seen as a 'checking mechanism' for consistency and continuous improvement (ibid. p.15). Yet she makes an interesting observation in that *"if assessment drives learning, then we have to be clear about the kind of learning that we want from students before we choose assessment methods"* (ibid. p.115). Her model implies that this 'learning' is gathered from first considering the learning outcomes and *"then the assessment criteria may be developed from the learning outcome, or from the assessment method or task, but in either case they should relate to the learning outcome* (ibid. p.17). The question, however, is whether the desired level, type or standard of learning is necessarily *only* a product of the learning outcomes or whether it can brought about by, or alongside, something else.

Moon's book provides plenty of discussion regarding the 'language' of level descriptors and problems with this in respect of the course designer, teacher and to the student. Indeed Moon states that *"I find myself more and more needing to explain that describing learning in terms of level descriptors or learning outcomes is a form of word play … we are doing our best to improve"* (ibid. p.10). This point is important, because as students will become increasingly consumerist, they will also naturally 'buy into' clear language.

3.4.1.4 Shaw and Jackson's model

Descriptive models illustrate what practitioners actually do and Shaw and Jackson's model (2002) is an example of this. They discuss a conceptual working model (ibid. pp.4-5) of curriculum design which, on the face of it, is an extension of Biggs' 1996 model of constructive alignment (see Figure 1) and is considered in the context of other work by Jackson et al. (2002). The paper is not refereed, but it is useful in that it outlines the initial ideas of the

LTSN (Learning Teaching and Support Network) Curriculum Network project team. These advisory teams promoted and supported high quality learning, teaching and assessment in UK higher education before the formation of the Higher Education Academy.

The model has six linear elements and, in common with the other models discussed in this thesis, assessment is placed almost at the end. However, in contrast to the other models discussed above, and whilst Shaw and Jackson's example (2002, p.2) has a linear look about it, it also exudes a more holistic view of curriculum design as the discussion of it identifies that concepts such as learning styles, support and guidance also impact upon the process. The impact of these further elements is also discussed alongside the model. In addition, external influences are also determined, and these are considered within the context of the model where they have most influence. They include the market, pressures for change, the national qualifications framework, level descriptors (as exemplified by Moon (2002) external examiner reports and subject benchmarks (Shaw and Jackson, 2002, p.4).

Based on this model, Jackson et al.'s (2002) paper is partly based on the conceptual understanding of how higher education teachers accumulate teaching knowledge and partly outlines their proposed linear design model. They used qualitative research studies to gain the perspectives of a comprehensive sample of teaching, academic and academic support staff and, whilst no details of the interviews were given, the results revealed that curriculum development is a messy process - a *"juggling act – all the variables are connected and decisions made in one area influence decisions in other areas"* and that *"we should not represent the curriculum as a linear process"* (2002. p.4).

Figure 4: Shaw and Jackson's model (this has been removed as permission to reproduce was not obtained).

Source: Shaw and Jackson 2002, pp.2-5

Moving away from the discussion of the four models, Prideaux (2003) comments that when considering the process of design *"all the elements in curriculum design are linked. They are not separate steps … and content must be delivered by appropriate teaching and learning methods and assessed by relevant tools. No one element – for example, assessment – should be decided without considering the other elements"* (ibid. p.270). This essentially is what constructive alignment supports. Boud and Falchikov have stated that the idea that the *"alignment of assessment, learning and instruction is one of the most important issues in educational innovation in recent years" (*2007, p.182) and section 3.4.3 includes a discussion of the consideration of the assessment.

But before discussing the issue of assessment alignment within module design, one further, and more recently created design model will be discussed. It was included in this thesis because it was launched as part of a large project that investigated innovative curriculum design, and also because the project updates produced by the participating institutions provided useful initial insights into staff experiences of curriculum design.

3.4.2 The curriculum life-cycle model

This 'how-to-design' model resulted from a research initiative from JISC (2009) and sets out the aims of a four-year project which investigated (via 12 individual projects) *"how processes involved in the design of programmes can be made more agile and responsive through the use of technology*" (ibid. p.1). In April 2010, the projects involved in the JISC 'Institutional Approaches to Curriculum Design' programme' *"reviewed their institutional curriculum design processes"* (JISC 2010a, p.1). The programme focused on learner-centred approaches to curriculum delivery and detailed its cyclical 'Curriculum Life-cycle' model alongside a second model concerning transformative theories on an institutional scale. Projects within the programme were *"testing process modelling tools … explaining ways of integrating a wide range of stakeholder views and embracing learners to benefit from more personalised curriculum designs"* (JISC 2009, p.1-2).

Figure 5: The curriculum life-cycle model (this has been removed as permission to reproduce was not obtained).

Source**:** Taken from JISC 2010b. Accessed 24 September 2010. http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearning/curriculumdesign/fundedprojects.aspx

Unlike the models described in the previous section, the curriculum life-cycle model does not have a start or end point and whilst it is described as a 'cycle' it is not directional; rather it consists of nine separate components (see Figure 5). It is, however, instructional and offers guidance and is designed to be used at whichever point of design one is at that time. In other words it does not assume that people necessarily have to start at a designated first point.

The life-cycle model advocates a *"very fluid / flexible vision that practitioners can share, access and search effectively …"* (ibid. p.1). By integrating external influences, it is reminiscent of some of the ideas promoted by Shaw and Jackson (2002) albeit in a more technological format. Whilst it is not a novel idea, part of JISC's vision for curriculum delivery is that learners are *"able to show evidence of their skills and achievements against the requirements of employers and professional bodies"* because *"technology is not the driving force … enhanced curriculum design also involves engaging the interest and participation of all concerned***"** (JISC 2009, p.2)**.** The key thing that is being said here is that it is not about what curriculum design is, but who does it, and with whom do they do it.

In reality though the curriculum life-cycle model is pitched at the institutional plane rather than the individual or module level and whilst it advocates that enhancing curriculum delivery via the appropriate use of technology can build teaching capacity, develop shared expertise and knowledge, innovate regional and international initiatives, improve learner satisfaction and increase institutional competitiveness (ibid. p.2), it has limited application to the practitioner who is working alone or as part of a small departmental team. This is because it generally focuses on the institutional systems that support curriculum design. Indeed, its 'grand scale' application implies grand costs – a point admitted in the first JISC 'Update from Project Interim Reports' (May 2010a) in that *"The projects are now operating in an economic climate that is vastly different to that in which the project outlines were conceived … the design projects certainly started out with the 'big idea' but are needing to find pragmatic responses to the realities of the current climate"* (ibid. p.2).

However, whilst the projects associated with the life-cycle programme did not actually use the life-cycle model, as they were concerned with design innovations of their own, some of their project updates are useful. For example City University's 'PREDICT' project has *"identified a need to support staff writing programme specifications to ensure that assessment criteria are clear … there will be clarity for students* (as to) *why specific approaches to*

learning and teaching are used" (2011 p.4). This suggests that the issues of transparency as discussed by Moon (see above) are being developed upon.

The 'PREDICT' project also aimed to explore *"the principles and values of all involved in curriculum design to identify what principles and values might underpin the design"*. Thus the brief was to *"examine models used when curriculum are being designed … discussing the staff development and support needed when undertaking curriculum design"* (ibid. p.1). University staff involved in design *"took part in questionnaires, interviews and providing case studies"* and *"workshops around curriculum design have been undertaken to share views … documentation related to design have been examined such as programme and module specifications"* (ibid. p.1).

Three of the projects within the JISC 'Institutional Approaches to Curriculum Design' programme have produced curriculum design models (JISC 2010b). For example Birmingham City University ('T-Sparc') generated a 'map of curriculum design' to support better consultation and collaboration between programme and course team members during various stages of programme design. The University of Ulster ('Viewpoints') objective was to create a suite of user-friendly reflective tools to help university staff plan their curriculum and to also create a model which incorporated 'click-on' steps to curriculum design (University of Ulster Viewpoints 2012). They observed that *"typically curriculum design was supported in an ad-hoc fashion, placing huge responsibilities on teaching and support staff"* (ibid. p.5) and the findings of their observations are discussed further on in this chapter. The University of Bolton 1996 ('Co-educate') produced an online tool with the aim of developing a technologically supported approach to programme development. Here, the needs of both employers and learners were used to drive both curriculum content and the mode of delivery. Interestingly, it found that members of staff were experiencing problems with the interpretation of module descriptors.

Although my research was not concerned with the models provided by these projects, their findings surrounding the practice of module and curriculum

design were important, because they suggested that module design was not being executed uniformly.

3.4.3 Curriculum design and consideration of the assessment

One of the common factors of the design models mentioned earlier in this chapter is that the method of assessment is considered after the determination of other components such as the learning or teaching outcomes. As the aim of this research includes exploring the consideration of the assessment in the module design process, this section takes a closer look at the literature around this concept.

In times of economic pressure it is often assessment that is the focus of curriculum evaluation (Biggs and Tang 2011) and there are a range of projects and initiatives that have focused on this (Price et al. 2011). Earlier sections of this chapter have demonstrated that consideration of the 'assessment' is located in the last stages of the four curriculum design models discussed in this thesis. This observation is not new however. Indeed in 2002, Knight (p.170), following his review of assessment practice, offers alternative approaches to considering the assessment at the end of the design process. However, his ideas remain undeveloped. Consequently this project considers the role of assessment in module design, a concept that is presently *"undermined because, in practice, it is often an afterthought"* (Price et al. 2011, p.480).

Daugherty et al. (2007, page not stated) assert that *"the issue of alignment of curriculum and assessment in UK higher education is being worked through at the local level as the tutors responsible for course units/modules plan their teaching".* In addition, Goos and Hughes' (2010) own "*investigation of the confidence levels of course/subject coordinators in undertaking aspects of their assessment responsibilities"* concluded that *"course coordinator comments attribute assessment problems to 'bureaucratic' requirements, workload issues and a lack of recognition of the resourcing implications"* (ibid. p.323). The issue here is that these additional factors (concluded by Goos and Hughes) are not always acknowledged by the design models.

Meyers and Nulty (2009, p.571) use their curriculum design principles to design courses that are real world, relevant and authentic, that are constructive, aligned and interlinked, that engage students in approaches that lead to deep learning and which are challenging, motivating and interesting. These are used to align authentic learning environments, assessment, students' approaches to thinking and learning outcomes. Meyers and Nulty explain that their *"course design was built on the understanding that the assessment tasks held together and sequenced all the other course components"* (ibid. p.571). As a result, they argue that *"assessment can and should take the central role in curriculum design because it is one of the first things students look at and because it defines the curriculum for them"* (ibid. p.574).

An aim of this research is to discover at what stage of the design process academics and module leaders consider the assessment. It also explores the role (if any) that contemporary design models have on the process. It is also interested in the experiences of module designers, how staff conduct the design process, and what influences and drives their approach. With all of this in mind, the next section looks at literature concerning espoused practice**.**

3.5 Espoused practice

Whilst this thesis was *initially* based on a personal hunch that experiences of module design and redesign in higher education are not broadly researched, we have seen from the earlier sections of this chapter that there is some literature which signposts some ways in which the process of curriculum design could operate. We have also seen that some curriculum design models inform practice by providing routes for designers to follow. In other words, if you want to know 'how to do it', here is a model that can show you what you could do. This is interpreted as being a pragmatic approach to design which is being used to provide something for people to work with.

On the other hand, there are some contrasting influences that can steer the design, review and redesign process and which are not based upon

educational models at all. These are discussed in the following two subsections: theoretically rooted practice and social epistemologies of practice.

3.5.1 Theoretically rooted practice

Chapter 2 of this thesis has already outlined the theoretical concept of social constructionism and how it sits in the context of this research, particularly in relation to knowledge and truth. Burr, in her discussion of social constructionism, suggests that social interactions, and in particular those that use language, are important as the *"goings-on between people in the course of their everyday lives are seen as the practices during which our shared versions of knowledge are constructed"* (2003, p.4). Indeed, Bamber et al.'s (2009) socio-cultural approach to the design and review of curricula is a good example of this observation. Whilst the authors do not refer to the worldview of constructionism itself, the theory is a variant of it in terms of the individual and social constructions which are influenced by social and cultural practices (Jaworski 1993). These perceptions sit neatly with Gergen's view that *"The terms on which the world is understood are social artefacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people"* (1985, p.267) in that there are common meanings and interpretations within universities that are shaped by language and other social activities.

Burr concedes that in general, *"the ways in which we commonly understand the world, the categories and concepts we use are historically and culturally specific"* and that *"it is through the daily interactions between people in the course of social life that our versions of the knowledge become fabricated"* (Burr 2003, p.3-4).

Bamber et al. suggest that it is not wise to assume that groups of academics "*are harmonious groups of like-minded folk"* (2009. p.12) as people's responses to curriculum design and review depends on the respective histories and social characteristics of each individual, team, department and institution.

Nevertheless, Burr (2007) suggests that there are shared traits amongst these group members. When using the analogy of family characteristics, she proposes that *"there is no one characteristic borne by all members of a family, but there are enough recurrent features shared amongst different family members to identify the people as technically belonging to the same group"* (2007, p.2). From this, I have interpreted that academics and module designers may share a kind of family resemblance with each other, although as we have already seen, paradoxically some projects have found no evidence of a common thread running through members of 'the family'. Nevertheless these commentaries are appealing when looking at module design practice, as they suggest that there could be common historical, social and or cultural perceptions of module design.

Theoretically, pragmatic approaches to philosophy advocate that *"an important indication of the truth of a belief or theory is its usefulness – that it works"* (Greetham 2006, p.79) and for some designers and/or developers, curriculum models might be useful. Greetham has employed the analogy of weight loss diets to illustrate this situation in that the *"diet works for me but not for my friend"* (ibid. p.78). Of course, an in-between view could be that design models can be usefully employed as a starting point in design which can be individually tailored according to institutional, departmental, employer and student needs and contexts. With this in mind, this thesis rejects pragmatic approaches (in the theoretical sense) as a universal solution to discovering the process of module design and redesign in higher education and speculates if there could be a more helpful epistemological and philosophical explanation.

Bamber et al.'s (2009) socio-cultural theoretical approach to the enhancement of curricula offers a useful perspective through which to look at the process of curriculum design. Their understanding of the 'social world' of universities is that:

1. People within universities, departments and teams interact, and in so doing develop a particular set of meanings about the world they are

2. dealing with. They also develop values, attitudes and practices which are, to some extent, unique to their social situation.

3. In their interactions – perhaps in developing a new syllabus, preparing to teach a course, or engaging in quality enhancement activities – they use artefacts and tools of various sorts which themselves influence the social reality in particular ways.

4. Discourses, the particular forms of talk and writing etc., which are mediated by deeper social forces and social structures, express social reality and also operate to constrain and delimit it.

5. Individual identity or subjectivity is both shaped by social context and itself can work to shape it. People interact at work and in so doing are also working to shape the identity of others and are themselves shaped, though they may also defend their identities from previous contexts. Social characteristics such as cultural context are important in change processes, but so are individual people.

6. Histories of individuals, groups, the institution, and the higher education system as a whole will impact on enhancement initiatives in the present.

7. A consequence of all of the above is that social context, and its particularities, is a very significant factor in the practice of enhancement. There are special features in every university, and every university department, every discipline, that mean that initiatives will be received, understood and implemented in ways which are, partly at least, unique. Any attempt to generalise across social contexts is fraught with danger. Social research into phenomena related to social interaction must take contextual contingency into account.

(Summarised from Bamber et al. 2009, p.9).

These ideas develop the earlier work of Becher and Trowler (2001) on academic tribes and territories; indeed Paul Trowler is a co-author of the 2009 book cited above. Whilst Trowler (2011a, unpaged) has suggested that

“the 'tribes' metaphor has probably outlived its usefulness”, remnants of the way in which disciplinary knowledge and histories shape academic practice (these are referred to as ‘territories’) are still evident in Bamber’s commentary above, particularly within points 4 and 5. Indeed Mathieson (2012), in a qualitative study of 30 academics across four disciplines, found that *“when viewing learning and teaching through a sociocultural lens … this … foregrounded a web of characteristics of these different ... TLA cultures that included a combination of values, shared repertoires of approaches to teaching and learning, and forms of relationship between academics and students and between groups of academics engaged in developing and delivering curricula. These localised work-group cultures had developed overtime in response to different historical moments and varying institutional and disciplinary contexts, and academics had developed deeply invested identities linked to these localised work-group cultures ...”* (Mathieson ibid. p.562). Nevertheless, Trowler (2011a, unpaged) goes on to say that ideological influences on learning and teaching practice *“ … mean that academics in the 'same' discipline take very different stances towards what they do and how they do it.”* The idea that work-groups (or teams) within different subject disciplines might (or might not according to Trowler) use practices that are influenced by their identity to that subject is something that will be returned to when discussing the findings of the empirical work from this project. For now, the next section looks at documented insights into the perceived real-world practice of curriculum design.

3.5.2 Social epistemologies of practice

This section presents some background literature on how epistemologies can influence the approaches of academics to learning and teaching and provides more insight into the question of how curricula are designed and redesigned.

A few of the JISC projects mentioned above have uncovered useful insights into the practice of curriculum design that suggest that there are personal influences on curriculum design practice. The University of Birmingham's

‘Technology-supported processes for agile and responsive curricula’ project (University of Birmingham T-Sparc) initiated a review of the current state of institutional processes and procedures for programme design. This arrived at a product entitled the *“lived experience of curriculum design”* (University of Birmingham (T-Sparc 2009 section 2). The project interviewed 17 academic staff who recalled their experiences of curriculum design during the project's initial explorations. The resulting multi-media review reported that drivers for curriculum design often began in the workplace settings of the people designing the curricula and that *“the starting point* (in curriculum design) *was the consideration of the types of skills required by students in the workplace”* (ibid. section 4). E-tools were considered by some interviewees to offer new opportunities in curriculum design and *“face-to-face meetings such as 'away-days' were the most prevalent mechanisms for initiating design”* (ibid. section 4). However, information perceived to be useful (such as progression statistics and external examiners reports) were reported to be difficult to find. Whilst institutional policies and processes were not deemed to be significant in the design process, building relationships with team members, other academics and external professions was considered to be important. Interviewees also reported that a ‘distributed’ design approach, whereby modules are *“individually designed and then collated into a programme at a later stage, was the more common mode of design but less effective”* (T-Sparc 2009 section 4). Whilst stakeholders were seen to have varying levels of input, *“a context of tight adherence* (compliance) *to documentary requirements might not create the best environment to support innovation in curriculum design”* (ibid. section 4). Interviewees considered that the programme director has a *“pivotal role in curriculum design”*, although *“Directors themselves found that they were often involved in administration rather than academic leadership”*. A small number of participants felt that *“efforts to try to 'capture' the programme in formal documentation allowed for further clarification and ideas”* although it was also suggested that *“academic language used throughout the curriculum design and programme approval process can limit the effectiveness of employer engagement with the design process”*. Finally whilst *“there was an understanding that programme*

documentation had a number of audiences (in theory), the crucial nature of satisfying the approval panel meant that documentation was written (almost exclusively) with that audience in mind" (all taken from T-Sparc 2009, section 4).

The project also reported *"a further issue in that institutions often place too much emphasis on the documentary artefacts produced by a process rather than the reflective processes themselves"* (ibid. section 4). Thus their baseline review *"revealed that when programme teams designed (or redesigned) courses they felt they spent a disproportionate amount of time 'preparing for an approval event' rather than 'designing for a course"* (University of Birmingham T-Sparc 2012a, p.1).

Using the process of naturalistic enquiry City University London employed staff workshops, individual interviews with staff, documentary analysis and student questionnaires to explore curriculum design processes (PREDICT 2012). The project noted that *"The wide ranging nature of curriculum processes means that in some cases projects are surfacing issues that are not within their remit to solve … In all institutions personalities and local politics play their part …"* (JISC 2010a, p.5).

A key finding in relation to design was put forward by the Open University as part of its own exploratory work. It commented that *"In respect to the visualisation of design, we have found that design as an approach offers particular philosophies, skills and techniques, and these do not map exactly to those currently used in writing or planning learning"* (OULDI 2010, section 6). In 2009 they conducted a baseline review which was executed via an online staff survey concerning practice, attitudes and use of e-learning. Data from the 50 respondents (out of 110 staff originally invited to participate) provided further insight into 'what is design' at the Open University (OULDI 2012). Staff were initially given 13 statements concerning learning design and they were invited to respond using a likert scale ranging from 'agree' to 'disagree'. Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted between October 2008 and January 2009 with staff who spanned a range of academic

and academic-related staff including course managers and leaders (Cross et al. 2008) There were five interview themes, which co*vered "support, representation, process, barriers, and evaluation, and on two distinct levels of the design process: individual and collective design"* (ibid. p.99).

The OULDI project remarked that the project *"... revealed a diversity of practitioner attitudes and abilities in relation to learning design … Around half believed it is becoming harder to understand how all the parts of planned learning and teaching fit together …"* (OULDI 2012, p.7).

Data from the interviews revealed that course designers generated ideas for learning activities from their own encounters with colleagues, at conferences, workshops, their previous collaboration with other courses and institutions and evidence of it working for another programme. Drivers for design included time, budgets, student feedback, the requirement to meet professional standards, the market and new technologies (OULDI 2009b). It was noted that one recurring theme *"was the way in which learning designs were considered as artefacts, objects created and passed through the design and delivery process between people"* (Cross 2009, p. 62) and these were seen to be useful documents to aid decisions concerning staffing resources, availability of time and budgets and *"as a guide to navigate course material for newcomers (including students)"* (ibid. p.63).

When reporting the issue of 'personal relationships versus design mechanisms', Birmingham University observed that *"Relationships are seen to be far more important than effective 'mechanisms' in delivering good curriculum design. Policies and defined processes are not seen to contribute significantly to the curriculum design process. Building relationships – professional and even social with fellow academics … senior managers, students and external examiners are cited as being the most important factor in 'getting the job done' "* (University of Birmingham T-Sparc 2009, section 4). Moreover, the baseline report produced by the University of Ulster (Viewpoints), and resulting from 13 semi-structured interviews with staff ranging from the Pro Vice-Chancellor in Teaching and Learning to new

academic staff, found that when establishing how curriculum is designed:

- Curriculum design is an on-going activity, which can be driven by a number of different agendas (personal, module, course and institutional);
- There is potential to influence curriculum development during three main phases (during initial course approval, when courses are delivered/managed and during course revalidation);
- Most curriculum innovations take place in the period between course (re)validations and the educational context to these changes may be influenced by quality-related processes and/or staff developing their own practice

(cited from University of Ulster Viewpoints 2012, p.10).

Moving away from the JISC projects, the work by Christakis and Fowler (2010) discussed ideas concerning how social networks operate (and the patterns that can be observed within them). In this context, a social network is a structure consisting of at least two individuals with interactive ties between them and the concept is useful when observing academic practice.

3.5.3 Communities of practice

Becher and Trowler suggested that *"Social interaction, communication of all sorts and the partly socially constructed nature of disciplines that is associated with them are the forces that bind together the sociological and the epistemological, giving shape and substance to the links between knowledge forms and knowledge communities"* (2001, p.104). In addition, *"social interaction can lead to mutually understood values, attitudes and taken for granted practices"* (Trowler et al. 2001 cited in Becher and Trowler 2001, p.104). These observations tie in with that of one blogger on the JISC 'Curriculum Design and Delivery' website who notes that *"the common thread ... is that the connections between people and the shared beliefs and behaviours that are particularly important. A critical mass of connections can*

create traits in networks that persist over time whilst individuals come and go" (Ferrell 2011, p.4).

This suggests that those involved in module design are part of what have been called 'communities of practice'. Wenger 1998 (cited in Rogan 2011, p.238) describes these as *"Members of a community informally bound by what they do together … and by what they behave learned through their mutual engagement in these activities"*.

The underpinning argument in Lave and Wenger's 1991 model of situated learning suggests that learning comes about by being involved and participating in a 'community of practice'. These communities, as proposed by Lave and Wenger, permeate our lives, and this suggests that we are members of at least one, whether it is at work, college or an organisation.

Wenger advocates that the presence of three criteria is crucial in establishing if a community of practice exists:

1. A domain – This refers to a shared domain of interest and competence that discerns members of the community from other persons;
2. A community – within this, members share information, they learn from one other and they foster mutually-informative relationships;
3. A practice – The members of a community of practice are not just mutually interested in something, they practice it too. In doing so, they share resources, experiences and tools that enable them to execute activities.

(Cited from Wenger-Trayner 2014, unpaged)

With respect to module and curriculum design this would propose that by sharing a common profession (academia) and executing a common line of work (module design, review and redesign) it is via the process of sharing information and experiences that university staff would both learn from one another, and would engage in collegial activity.

Yet the characteristics of a community of practice could differ, even if the shared interest is common, as module design, review and redesign would depend on the unique histories and social characteristics and interactions within each institution, department, team or individual. These are not always under our control. We have already seen that some of the JISC projects have provided initial insights of influences in design practice by citing key words such as ‘academic experience’, ‘vested interest’ and ‘individual and social agendas’. Their findings concerning the individual and collaborative practices of university staff, along with the work of other researchers, and the theoretical concepts discussed above, provided the backdrop for this project, and were instrumental in devising the research questions that this thesis would address. However, and before presenting the research questions fully, other published work which discusses influences on the practice of module design will now be discussed.

3.5.4 Other influences on curriculum and module design

Beetham (2009, section A) asserts that the design of curricula involves thinking about issues such as:

- the desired outcomes of learners, including skills, knowledge, aptitudes and qualities
- learners' likely needs and starting-points including pre-requisite skills etc
- requirements of any professional bodies or associations, and/or graduate employers or external stakeholders
- relationship to other programmes and modules
- marketisation i.e. likely demand
- external examiners' reports and other evidence e.g. from current teaching staff
- available resources including staff expertise

This list implies a student oriented approach and one that considers the employability of students in the real world. It is also mindful of staff resources and appears to be a response to the changing climate within higher education. Certainly it is a reflection of current practice as observed by the author of this thesis.

By looking more at process, rather than content, The University of Ulster Viewpoints project (2012, p.3) identified a number of influencing factors on the development processes. These were *"categorised as those which have strategic influence, those that influence a process and those which have potential to influence practice"*. Strategic influences included the teaching and learning strategy, student charters and quality assurance processes. Factors that influence the development process include university information and resources such as templates, web resources and handbooks. Potentially influencing factors include their own curriculum reflection tools, student feedback and staff development workshops (ibid. 2012).

On the other hand, Anderson (2011. p.71) has identified five factors that are deemed to have considerable influence on curriculum design. These are the local context, expectations of society, technology, research trends and policy.

With respect to the role of policy, he makes the point that *"... one would hope that the policy influences would not be too restrictive of staff's academic freedom to be creative and innovative during curriculum development, but rather that policy would emerge as a consequence of the collaborative curriculum process"* (ibid. p.71).

This notion of academic freedom and creativity is something that one might think would present itself in design practice, particularly when new curricula are being created or when existing curricula are undergoing review and change, not only at programme level but also at individual module level.

Rather than concentrating on process and content, Trowler (1998) considered staff responses in academia and investigated (via a case study) the lived experiences of higher education at the ground level. He did not

account for the way in which staff designed their curricula, but in documenting responses to change he, in short, describes staff as either sinkers, swimmers, copers or those who restructure policy.

Trowler explained that academics who were 'sinking' engaged in *"conformity, ritualism and even retreatism"* as the *"intensification in workload, decline of resources, de-skilling in some cases, increase in student numbers … have led to weariness, disillusionment and even illness for these academics"* (ibid. p.114). Swimmers accepted changes in higher education practice because they saw it as creating an environment in which they could prosper. Trowler noted that many academics who could be situated under this category *"… gained course leaderships, promotion and the prerogative of being able to determine their own fields of teaching and research"* (ibid. p.119).

Many of the academics that Trowler collected data from had developed strategies to cope with changes in higher education. Such strategies helped to alleviate stress and illness, but *"... they often had negative consequences for students and others"* (ibid. p.122). For example, copers often used the same lecture slides each year in order to save time on re-writing teaching material.

Those who engaged in policy reconstruction formed the largest group (Trowler 1998). They either rebelled, innovated or both and many also developed pro-active coping strategies (ibid. 1998). Trowler explained this label by stating that *"policy reconstruction is used here, then, to refer to the processes academics engage in when they reinterpret and reconstruct policy on the ground, using strategies to effectively change the policy, sometimes resisting change, sometimes altering its direction. These academics, then, took a robust approach to their working context, acting as movers and shakers"* (ibid. p.126). Trowler found that policy reconstruction was evident in a number of activities, including curriculum and syllabus innovation.

Coria et al. (2010) also examined *"curricula changes … to show the major observations made during the accreditation process and the possible tensions generated within institutions throughout the implementation of*

change" (p.247). They found that *"The evidence shows that universities faced problems when they attempted to implement changes to adjust curricula … due to individual and organisational resistance to change"* (ibid. p.247). The research used questionnaire and interview techniques and the research sample were *"members of the academic community involved in accreditation processes"* (ibid. p.252), although it is not known how many respondents there were, or what the response rate was. A 'five point' scale was used to gauge their degree of agreement with a number of statements (ibid. 2010). The respondents indicated that there were a number of reasons that could be used to explain why institutions had problems with implementing curricular changes (ibid. p.253) such as structural inertia due to a lack of time to implement changes, the lack of consensus between students and teaching staff which resulted in a mismatch of curricula, and a resistance to change resulting from tensions between teaching staff due to the effect of change on reduced human and financial resources. Finally, some respondents also thought that curricular changes were hard to implement because staff were reluctant to change their teaching habits (all from Coria et al. pp 253-254).

With this mind, Coria et al. concluded that, *"taking into account the individual and organisational resistance to change, if the accreditation process had not been mandatory, some important changes in curricula would not have been fulfilled or they would have been more time-consuming. The difficulties of implementing changes in curricula show the difference among what universities know they 'should' do and what they 'can' do"* (ibid. p.255).

One observation that could emerge from this research is that, arguably, curriculum design models are detached from the reality of policy and quality assurance regimes, which exert more influence on practice, and are also peripheral to the views and orientations of staff who work within such policies.

Interestingly, Trowler suggests that *"the pre-existing values and attitudes of staff, both academics and others, need to be understood and addressed when considering change. Individuals and groups are far from 'empty-*

headed', especially those in universities. They have values and attitudes which are often deeply rooted in early and later socialization and reinforced by daily recurrent behaviours and these are used to facilitate critical thinking and deploy arguments in support of their point of view" (1998, p.151). Henkel's work also demonstrated *"evidence of differing degrees of willingness to compromise"* (2000, p.223). In this instance, interviews with academics were executed following the era of the modularisation and transformation of higher education in the 1990s. The data showed *"academics managing multiple agendas, incorporating multiple values. New languages had, in many cases, not diminished commitment to academic values and pre-existing concepts of higher education but it was not always clear how individuals were managing their coexistence"* (ibid. p.223). On a positive note, *"Those who had been involved, and particularly those who had taken a lead, in major curriculum change were frequently well satisfied with the results, even if they acknowledged that it entailed losses. Their professional identity had been enhanced in the process of change"* (Henkel 2000, p.230).

Fitzmaurice (2013) used interview data to explore the difficulties of constructing identities for new academics, particularly with respect to the effect of changing student profiles. Using qualitative interview data, he found that interviewees' thought processes focussed on 'what it is to be an academic', and that this is an emotive process. This is underpinned by care and compassion, particularly when thinking about student needs. The recognition of student needs in curriculum design was also something that Henkel (2000) found. He noted that *"Scientists in two strong departments of an old university felt that they had become more realistic about the students … They were thinking more about what they were aiming to do … There was also a new recognition of what students needed outside the formal curriculum"* (ibid. p.231).

With regard to resources, Becher and Trowler (2001 p.197) observed that *"it must first be remarked that a large majority of academic departments are expected to maintain teaching programmes across a wide spectrum of the*

subject areas they represent. This means that, unless they are relatively large, their staffing policies have to be geared to the provision of several different specialisms, and hence that their academic membership can usually include no more than one or two people within any given specialism". Likewise, Henkel (2000, pp.233-234) also observed that *"The demands for focus and structure represented by new forms of curriculum organisation meant adapting to reduced resources, reduced expectations and shifts in the balance of power over higher education".*

With respect to the shifting balance of power, Louvel (2013) in her qualitative study of curriculum and module change in French higher education described the notion of network bricolage (the use of resources to provide solutions) whereby academics draw upon their existing contact networks (which existed from an international to local scale). Using qualitative data from a number of French universities she noted three situations in curriculum development where bricolage could be observed (all from Louvel 2013, pp. 679-682):

1. **When developing a specialised programme:** In this situation Louvel found that academics exhibited *"manipulative strategies or high levels of pro-activity with their environments"*

2. **When amalgamating existing programmes:** In this situation there was a *"give and take interplay between local constraints. Academics used manipulation tactics to assemble courses into concrete programmes"*.

3. **When renewing existing programmes:** This was the most commonly executed form of curriculum development which was used when existing programmes were being updated. Nevertheless, some academics employed *"avoidance strategies … they maintained non-conformity behind a facade of acquiescence"* (ibid. pp. 679-682).

Referring back to the issue of resources, Louvel also found that whilst academics *"rely on a collective 'repertoire' of existing courses, available equipment and other resources, funding, departmental support"* they *"have*

considerable discretion in designing potential new courses, and in re-using resources they may have acquired for other purposes ..." (ibid. p.678).

Societal expectations also influence curricula *"as universities can no longer retain the old "ivory tower" attitude as they are accountable to the public, funders, the government, professional societies, activist groups and any other stakeholders"* (Anderson 2011, p.72).

The expectation that the profession has of academics is also important. For example, Norton et al.'s (2010) UK in-depth interview study of new lecturers participating in a two-year postgraduate certificate programme in learning and teaching in higher education revealed that a major issue, and not one that their interviewees found it easy to compromise on, was the competing roles of research and teaching. However, when turning to 'Research Trends' Anderson conversely asserts that *"Trends in educational research also have a profound influence on all components of the curriculum, and it is considered an important part of scholarship in teaching keeping up to date with the latest trends and innovations available to curriculum developers"* (2011, p.72). This is not something new, as following the modularisation of degree programmes, Henkel found that *"In all types of institution and department individuals participating in the study gave detailed accounts of precisely targeted and innovative approaches to teaching"* (2000, p.232). Despite this however, the Open University (OULDI 2009b) identified one recurrent theme in their interviews of staff which was *"a perceived need for greater pedagogic knowledge and 'chalk face' experience of design" as* one respondent commented *"designers without the specific expertise are not necessarily the best people to be designing the activities"* (ibid. 2009b, p.51).

Lastly, and with respect to 'Technology', Anderson suggests that course curricula need to keep up with technological advancements by preparing students to become competent. In addition, he states that *"advancements in computer technology have had a profound influence on the design of course curricula, especially on the mode of delivery of courses. Platforms like Blackboard and Moodle are increasingly being used to facilitate the*

curriculum management, teaching and assessment of courses while the number of e-learning approaches and resources has increased exponentially" (2011, p.74). The Open University also found that influences upon learning activity design included *"market demand, budget and time, the culture of an institution's learning influences such as the need to meet professional qualifications and alter course components due to student feedback or introduction of new technologies ..."* (OULDI 2009b).

3.6 Critical findings of the literature review

Having presented literature concerning insights into what is a curriculum, what design is and how design is executed; it is evident that module and curriculum design and redesign is a complicated business. There is consistency amongst commentators who report ad-hoc processes, evidence of resistance and subject knowledge. There are also clear indications, especially when examined from a theoretical stance, that practice is affected by historical influences and the availability of tools and resources.

Academics are also operating in a period of change and uncertainty that is affected by policy, the market, changing technologies and long-held personal practices that permeate through higher education. There is educational literature out there but it is uncertain how influential it is within the design and redesign process. Models of curriculum design are not inadequate, but the above review has highlighted that academic practice might not be informed or evidenced by them, as it is informed by other things.

There is also evidence that the curriculum design and redesign process is a continual and on-going process. Academics are still designing, redesigning and tweaking, even if they seem to be using inconsistent processes that cannot be universally pinned down across the sector.

This project is concerned with staff experiences of module design practice at the ground level. The findings of this research will be evaluated against those produced by the JISC staff surveys, the work of Bamber et al. (2009), Becher and Trowler (2001), Beetham (2009a), Henkel (2000), Coria et al. (2010) and

Anderson (2011). The research findings are also discussed against additional literature which is not included in this literature review. This is because the data (particularly arising from the interviews) revealed unexpected issues and concepts which necessitated the reading of additional literature towards the end of the project. These later readings are woven into the discussion of the qualitative data (see Chapter 6).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the literature discussed in the preceding sections was used to inform the research questions employed for this project. These are discussed next.

3.7 The research questions

A number of observations emerged from the literature and these informed the research questions for this study. These observations can be grouped under three headings:

1. Influences of design

Shaw and Jackson (2002) suggest that design decisions are not made in an idealistic vacuum. Indeed some of the reviewed literature asks what are the principles and values that underpin design (Predict 2011), do academics adapt strategic behaviours when engaging in curricula change (Louvel 2013) and do academics act logically in the design process (Bamber et al. 2009)? In addition, a number of authors cited in this chapter (the JISC projects, Beetham 2009, Anderson 2011, Trowler 1998, Coria 2010, Becher and Trowler 2001, Louvel 2013, Henkel 2000 and Norton 2010) cited a range of influencing factors. Some of these were based on personal traits, such as lecturers having compassion for student needs (Fitzmaurice 2013), and others were based upon the perceived problems with design (particularly of the assessment) which can be attributed to bureaucracy, workload and resource issues (Goos and Hughes 2010).

2. **Working relationships**

This heading embraces the concept of the development of localised work-group teaching, learning and assessment cultures (Mathieson 2012) whereby academics developed working relationships within these cultures. In the T-Sparc project (2009) relationships were also seen to be more effective mechanisms in designing good curricula. This is an interesting observation, as there is a question of whether or not curriculum design constitutes a community of practice comprising individual or collaborative experiences or both (Lave and Wenger 1998).

3. **Evidence-informed design practice**

Literature concerning models of design and considerations of curriculum design, such as the learning outcomes and the assessment were raised in the work of Biggs (Biggs and Tang 2010), Toohey (1999), Moon (2002), Shaw and Jackson (2002) and the JISC Lifecycle model.

Taking into account the above observations, this project investigated one question:

What influences and drives academics when they are designing and redesigning modules?

There were three sub-questions:

1. Is the experience of module design and redesign an individual practice or is it more of a collaborative one?
2. What is the relationship between contemporary design models and module design and how much impact do they have on the process?
3. At what stage of the design process do academics and module leaders consider the assessment task for their modules (compared to the teachings of educational developers and theorists) and what factors influence this?

To address these questions, the author explored the experiences of university staff involved in module design, review and redesign. Taking on board the view of Creswell (2007) she wanted to identify:

What personal statements describe these experiences?

What themes emerge from these experiences?

What is the overall essence of the experience?

Through this, the author wanted to discover:

What do people actually do?

How do they do it?

Why do they do it that way?

What does this actually say about module designers? (Cresswell 2010, p.110)

The methodological approach used to execute the aim of the project, to answer the research questions and to obtain the required data is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: The methodology: data sources and methods

4.1 Introduction

As mentioned previously, this project involved researching a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in which I am both employed as an academic (who is involved in the module design, review and redesign process) and registered as a doctoral student. This project was therefore conducted as a piece of insider research. To execute it, mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) were used to collect data from staff employed within the university and who were all involved in module design and redesign. This approach provided convergent validity (Cohen et al. 2011, p.22) as both types of data have contributed to *"the corroboration of the resulting information and render less biased and more accurate conclusions"* (ibid. p.22).

The first stage of data collection used a primarily quantitative e-survey. There were no open-ended questions but some participants added some qualitative comments and this is further explained later in this chapter. The second stage of data collection employed qualitative semi-structured interviews. This strategy formed part of a 'sequential mixed design' (Cohen 2011) and helped to *"provide a more complete picture … than would be yielded by a single approach"* (Denscombe 2003, p.272). During the interviews participants were engaged in talking, exploring and reflecting and the ensuing data included thoughts, opinions, experiences, beliefs, reactions, judgements and reflection. Alternative single research strategies were considered; for example 'survey research' was rejected because this project was interested in people's detailed accounts of their experiences and a survey was not considered to be an appropriate method of eliciting rich information. Because the research drew on the input of individuals over only one academic semester, the risk of drop off (due to research fatigue) was not considered to be a threat.

Following an overview of the potential implications of conducting insider research, the remainder of this chapter provides an overview of the

methodological approach used to collect and analyse the data from the e-questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. It is a chapter of two parts: the first looks at the quantitative survey phase and the second at the qualitative interview phase. My reflections concerning the data collection and analysis and the discussion of any ethical issues permeate this chapter. The latter is particularly discussed in section 4.3.2, section 4.3.7 (regarding anonymity when analysing the questionnaire, section 4.4.7 (concerning the execution of the interviews) and section 4.4.13 (when handling perceived sensitive data).

4.2 Exploring the complexity of insider research

When researching the institution at which you are employed, there will possibly be instances where the interviewer is known to the interviewee (and vice versa). Thus Costley et al. suggest that careful consideration of one's position within the research setting is required when conducting insider research. They assert that *"...the culture and structure of your work situation and the actions and thinking of colleagues are likely to shape your work. When researchers are insiders, they draw upon the shared understandings and trust of their immediate and more removed colleagues with whom normal social interactions of working communities have been developed"* (2010, p.1). This can be an advantage to the researcher. For example, all of the interviews that I conducted were executed on familiar university premises. This meant that the interview process was less of a daunting task for me and removed any potential additional financial costs. However, other researchers might feel awkward gathering data in the place that they work and amongst colleagues with whom they have built established relationships.

As a salaried academic (who was also registered as an internal doctoral student) I was without doubt an 'insider researcher'. I had been employed by the University since 2005 and until 2010 I had been an hourly-paid employee contracted to co-ordinate, teach and lead up to six modules at any one time. I was also contracted to supervise dissertation students, act as a personal tutor and to mark and set assessments. Because of my considerable involvement in the undergraduate degree course, I was enrolled onto the in-

house Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education (PGCHE) programme and I regularly attended team meetings and Boards of Examiners. In 2010, I was issued with a three-year contract (rather than an hourly-paid one), but two years into this contract (2012) I was given permanent status and became a programme director (or course leader) for a large undergraduate degree programme. At my institution, the duties of a programme director include module and programme review and any necessary redesign, responsibility for programme and module content and quality and engaging in aspects of learning, teaching and assessment. In terms of being an insider researcher, therefore, I had personal experience and interest in the subject of this thesis.

Having decided what I wanted to research, the decision to survey and interview academics from within my own university was a natural one. However, there are some arguments against insider research. For example Morse (1998) fiercely advocates that *"it is not wise for an investigator to conduct a qualitative study in a setting where he or she is already employed and has a work role. The dual roles of investigator and employee are incompatible, and they may place the researcher in an untenable position"* (cited in Brannick and Coghlan 2007, p.59). Costley et al. also suggest that "*... because of the issue of the subjective nature of researching your own practice, where there may be a lack of impartiality, a vested interest in certain results being achieved, and problems concerning a fresh and objective view of data …"* (2010, p.4). This quotation refers to objective epistemologies and positivistic theoretical positions being threatened by an insider researcher's inability to be objective.

Indeed, Sayer asks "*if the social world is socially constructed and significantly concept-dependent, how can it be treated as independent of the researcher's knowledge?*" (2002, p.32). This is because during the research process the perceptions, experiences, views and histories of the researcher are present in the same quantities as for the researched. Thus the researcher is not peripheral to the process and illustrates how complex things could be. Such pre-conceptions are the *"assumptions, knowledges, and biases that we bring to the research"* and these are addressed via a *"reflexive approach to the*

research, where the researcher examines her or his social identity and values as they affect interpretation of the data" (Vernon, 1997 cited in Foster 2009, p.22). However, these points can be qualified in terms of the critical subjectivity that I brought to the project and this is something that is explained further as this chapter progresses.

In contrast to the views held by Morse, there are also a number of documented advantages of insider research. Trowler observes that *"researching your own HEI ... offers a distinctive form of ... 'exemplary knowledge', which draws its legitimacy from the fact that it is corrigible and interpretable in the context of experience rather than theory* (2011b, p.3). Thus it is considered to be real and worthy as the personal experience and knowledge of the institution which is being researched (and possibly the phenomenon of topic of interest too) is a redeeming quality in itself. Hannabus (2000) also notes that *"the [insider] researcher knows his/her environment well, knows by instinct what can be done and how far old relationships and favours can be pressed, just when and where to meet up for interviews, what the power structures and the moral mazes and subtexts of the company are and so what taboos to avoid ... In addition, insider researchers usually have credibility and rapport with the subjects of their studies, a fact that may engender a greater level of candour than would otherwise be the case"* (cited in Mercer 2007, p.7).

There are some assumed drawbacks of insider research which are linked to the personal knowledge that the researcher holds, either about the phenomenon being studied, the organisation being researched or the participants of the project. For example, Drake suggests that *"...with this style of working comes privileged access to informants or participants, although this closeness may seem to compromise the researcher's ability to engage critically with the data"* (2010, p.85). These observations cited by Drake raise the issue of the researcher having 'tacit' information. The effect of this information on the data collection and the analysis process is discussed next.

4.2.1 Tacit information

Brannick and Coghlan (2007, p.65) have suggested that *"The knowledge, insights, and experience of the insider researchers apply not only to theoretical understanding of organizational dynamics but also to the lived experience of the researcher's own organisation"*. As a practising academic, I quickly located the theoretical underpinnings for the research (see Chapter 2) as I was influenced by the practices that I had observed in colleagues and myself. Edwards (2002, p.72) has made three observations about a person who is embarking on researching the organisation or group that they have been a member of, particularly if they have been part of that organisation for a while:

1. Firstly, the organisation and group memberships are the subjects of deeply embedded historical knowledge possessed by the researcher and have been for some time under scrutiny, review and adjustment.

2. Secondly, now that the member is also a researcher, a process of self-interpretation is initiated with the change in role in relation to others.

3. Finally the member/researcher is aware of the organisational history and personal relationships which are interwoven with that history. Much of this may be undiscovered to outsiders apart from the organisational elements (all from Edwards 2002, p.72).

The first and third observations are often referred to as 'pre-understandings'. These take into account *"people's knowledge, insights and experience before they engage in a research programme"* (Gummesson, 2000, cited in Brannick and Coghlan 2007, p.65).

In my research, the questionnaire did not necessarily have to be designed, administered and analysed by an 'insider'. However, I did design it, and it is true that because I had experience (and pre-understandings) of the module design process, it meant that little background investigation was required. It was also easier for me to appreciate the language, acronyms and technical speak that could be used in the questionnaire. For example I could use terms

such as PGCHE (which is the acronym for an in-house training programme) or PEP (which refers to the programme evaluation and review documents completed by programme leaders). Edwards illustrates this last point by saying that *"The deep insider has no need to learn 'native' talk – the lingua franca of the organisation or groups within it"* (2002, p.74). In addition, the questionnaire was sent to an external academic pilot community (this is discussed later in this chapter) and the resulting quantitative data was analysed and presented by the computer programme administering the questionnaire (Bristol Online Survey or BOS) and on a technical level no insider knowledge was required to execute this. It also helped me to realise which of (and in what ways) the quantitative data was most interesting. For example, I noticed that a number of respondents did not look at other modules (as a comparison) within the programme when designing a module. One would normally do this so as to ensure that there was no duplication of the curriculum and that there was programme cohesion. But I also noticed that some of these respondents were programme leaders, who are given the responsibility of overseeing a programme and the content of the modules within it. As a practising academic (and a programme leader myself) I noticed this response straight away.

In addition, and when discussing and interpreting the data, designing the interview schedule, listening to the interviewees and analysing the qualitative data, my tacit knowledge certainly played a part in the process because I was able to understand the terms and acronyms that they used when recalling their design and redesign experiences.

As all academic and academic-related staff were invited to participate in the project and everyone who wanted to be interviewed was included in the research, the survey and interview population were not skewed towards any particular group of employees (for example only lecturers).

Whilst colleagues knew little about the project, unlike Mercer (2007, p.8) I did not talk about my research with anyone at the university except for my supervisory team. My supervisors had agreed not to participate in the

questionnaire and I did not want to interview them, as I wanted to avoid contaminating potential respondents and interviewees which might have affected the data that I was given.

Once the data collection process began, a large proportion of my colleagues and university personnel quickly became aware of what I was investigating, mostly as a result of the communications via the internal university email system. All staff are allocated an internal email address and are included in various email correspondence groups such as academic staff and non-academic staff. IT administrators are able to send emails to particular groups of staff by isolating certain email groups. The details of my project were sent to staff included in two groups: academic staff and academic-related staff, and these are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Once the project became institutional knowledge, I did wonder if this would affect my personal working relationships with staff and colleagues. This is because *"the change in role may mean that the insider-researcher is no longer privy to the kind of inside information previously enjoyed"* (Humphrey 1995 cited in Edwards 2002, p.78). However, I was not made explicitly aware that colleagues were withholding any information that I would normally be privy to.

One further issue that the insider researcher should be aware of is where over time, or following an adjustment process, institutional or organisational practices become commonplace or 'normal' to those working within the organisation. Indeed when advising new researchers about the pitfalls of researching their own institution, Trowler states that *"you may find it difficult to 'see' some dimensions of social life because they have become normalised for you ... there may be conflicts between your role as a researcher and your professional or student role in the HEI, and respondents who know you may have pre-formed expectations of your alignments and preferences in ways which change their responses (a form of the effect called 'interview bias')"* (2011b, p.2).

The issues surrounding the execution of the interviews will be discussed in section 4.4.7, but the normalisation of what other people might consider to be situated practice and whether or not an insider researcher like me will choose to ignore it or to investigate it further, is one issue that we will concentrate on for now. For example Brannick and Coghlan illustrate how insider research can be valid and useful in their accounts of the reality of organisations, *"which traditional approaches may not be able to uncover"* (2007, p.66). In this research, my experience of working in the institution helped facilitate the interviews. I knew about time-scales, organisational structures and boundaries and when to probe further and when not to say anything. For example, I did not question the role of subject divisions within the individual schools (now called faculties) and in many cases I knew who an interviewee's line manager or immediate colleagues were, and therefore I did not have to ask questions when somebody's name was mentioned. Yet Mercer questions the worth of such insider knowledge in that *"greater familiarity can make insiders more likely to take things for granted, develop myopia, and assume their own perspective is far more widespread than it actually is ... (Brekhus, 1998) … the 'obvious' question might not be asked (Hockey, 1993); the 'sensitive' topic might not be raised (Preedy and Riches, 1988); shared experiences might not be explained (Powney and Watts 1987); assumptions might not be challenged (Hockey, 1993); seemingly shared norms might not be articulated (Platt 1981) ..."* (Mercer 2007, p.7). However, to have interrupted the interviewees asking for explanations of 'the obvious' would have not only disrupted the natural flow of the interviews (almost all of which verged on one-sided conversations where the interviewee just talked continuously) but it would very possibly have irritated the interviewee and raised unnecessary suspicion in that they would have at least wondered why I was questioning widely-known information which they would have expected me, via my assumed tacit knowledge, to know. It has to be remembered that some interviewees knew my role within the university and therefore I could not play the naive interviewer. As a result, I simply kept quiet during the interviews. One example of this was when about three-quarters of the interviewees were referring to what one person called the *"ridiculous time-*

scales" that form part of the process used when someone would like to tweak or make minor amendments to their module format. Whilst I might not have described the time-scales as being ridiculous, I do know (from my own experience) that they can be restrictive upon my own practice, and that amendments to the documentation are required before one has finished teaching the module, and certainly a good while prior to receiving student feedback. Thus, by not saying anything, by not giving an opinion on the matter, I found that rich information could be elicited from the interviews.

The above paragraph concludes my reflection of insider research. Whilst a discussion of the approaches employed in the execution of the interviews forms part two of this chapter, the next section concerns the first phase of the data collection process in which the quantitative survey is presented and discussed.

4.3 Part one: The quantitative survey

Like the interviews, the first stage of the data collection also looked at what was happening in respect to the practice of module and curriculum design. This was executed by using an e-questionnaire. The rationale for using an initial questionnaire survey is outlined next.

4.3.1 The questionnaire survey design

The questionnaire survey had three aims: the first was to produce a descriptive overview of current module design practice within the university of focus; the second was to elicit a sufficient number of volunteer interviewees for the next stage of data collection (the follow-up interviews); and the third was to provide a pool of responses that would help to influence the questions that participants would be asked in the interview schedule.

The survey was compiled from my own knowledge of module design, review and redesign, some input from the supervisory team and also by working closely with the research questions. In addition, the themes concerning what influences curriculum design (such as resources, student profiles and institutional policies) that were highlighted in the literature review also

informed the survey questions. From my own experience of completing on-line institutional questionnaires, I felt that it was important to design a survey that could be completed very quickly (for example in less than ten minutes) because I did not want respondents to be put off by a more time-consuming questionnaire. However, I needed to design a survey that would still produce sufficient data to indicate how people were designing their modules. As it was a voluntary exercise, anything that was perceived by the respondent to be taking too much time to complete might result in an incomplete or abandoned response.

The software used to implement the survey was *'Bristol on-line'* (BOS) which has been successfully employed in other projects undertaken within the university, including the institutional equivalent of the NSS (National Student Survey). It is used by approximately 130 universities and public organisations such as the Higher Education Academy (HEA) in their 'Postgraduate Research Experience Survey' (BOS 2014). As my institution was already subscribed to the service and little technical knowledge is required to set up a survey or analyse the results (it is very easy to use), I decided that this would be a useful tool for me to employ.

4.3.2 Participants and the sampling method

Ethics approval for the project was granted by the institutional Humanities, Social and Health Sciences Research Ethics Panel on 29 May 2012. As mentioned previously, and as shown in Table 2, all staff who were included in the 'academic staff' and 'academic-related staff' email lists in June 2012, compiled by Human Resources, provided the criterion sampling frame.

The institutional IT administrator electronically disseminated the survey (without having to see the individual names), as I do not have authorization to use the staff email listings. I therefore did not have access to the names that were included on the lists.

Table 2: Questionnaire survey population, sample and response rate, and subsequent number of interviewees

Type of staff	Population	Sample (respondents)	Response rate (%)	Number of interviewees
Academic	586	82	13.99	23*
Academic-related	372	14	3.76	0
All	958	96	10.02	0

*37 respondents expressed an interest in being interviewed. 23 of these responded to follow-up communications and all were actually interviewed.
Source: Human Resources data supplied by the university of focus

Academic-related staff are people who are employed in managerial, support and professional roles such as subject-librarians or project managers. As the questionnaire concerned module design practice, the main population target was academic staff, but as Cresswell asserts, it was *"essential that all participants have experience of the phenomenon being studied. Criterion sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon"* (2007, p.128). Thus academic-related staff were also included in the sample and it later transpired that some of the respondents were academic-related staff (see Table 2). This was a good example of my insider knowledge as I knew that in this institution academic-related staff can sometimes be involved in the design, review and redesign of modules.

Despite a 'consent' process being in place and assurances of anonymity following the questionnaire completion (BOS automatically aggregates and anonymises the data as the survey progresses and uses a hyperlink rather than identifying user-names and log in passwords), I did not want anyone to feel obliged to participate in the survey. Thus I felt that by contacting potential participants electronically via a 'Staff Briefing' communication (a kind of in-house online weekly update tool), instead of a personal email, it was easier for them to decline participation. This was particularly the case

when it was also made clear in the opening text that there was no obligation to participate.

It was difficult to quantify the exact number of staff who were sent the questionnaire as Human Resources do not keep numerical records of staff e-mailing lists. However, information supplied by Human Resources using a 'Staff Numbers by Job Family' data file indicated that there were 372 academic-related staff and 586 academic staff included on the staff file. This totalled 958 people. In addition, and at that time, there were also 875 part-time hourly paid lecturers. However, and from my own experience, hourly-paid staff are not added to the University emailing lists and some of them use private email addresses. The survey did not exclude hourly-paid members of staff but if they did not use an in-house email address then they would not have received the invitation to participate in the survey. I considered it unethical to enquire about the private email addresses of hourly-paid staff. However I did not consider this to be a problem as module design is not normally an hourly-paid member of staff's responsibility (it would be an extreme exception rather than the rule) and the survey population was large enough for the survey to achieve its aims and purposes as set out in chapter one.

4.3.3 Piloting the questionnaire

The questionnaire was piloted with a small number (six) of academics known personally to me but who were employed at other universities. I did not carry out an in-house pilot survey because I explained to the pilot cohort why I was asking particular questions. If I had employed in-house staff, I would have had to ask them not to complete the live survey, as they would have had privileged information. The piloting exercise led to the questionnaire being revised twice, partly to improve the clarity of two of the questions, and partly to include some optional responses that had not been previously considered. For example, in question 8 there is an additional sentence which explains what 'reviewing and/or adjusting an existing module' means. In addition, in question 9 the option 'External events, such as conferences or seminars' was

added to the original list of options. The resulting pilot data was subsequently analysed and it was this final pilot exercise that proved to be the most significant part of the process, as it resulted in the style of three of the questions being revised (although the purpose of the questions remained the same) so that they could better fit the analytical options provided by the 'Bristol online' computer software. For example, BOS did not allow for the use of likert scales, and therefore those questions (which referred to how experienced the respondent thought they were) were reworded so as to give a choice of answers that could be ticked.

4.3.4 Administering the questionnaire

Prospective participants were invited on 21 June 2012 (using the university email system) to self-complete the questionnaire (see Appendix 1). The invitation included an introduction to, and an outline of the project, and explained that the survey would take no more than 10 minutes to complete as it mostly consisted of questions that used tick-boxes. The pilot group stated that they had completed the survey in just over six minutes, but I decided that a slight increase in the estimated completion time was reasonable. A hyperlink (rather than identifying user-names and passwords) enabled access to the questionnaire (see Appendix 2), and consent was implied when respondents proceeded to the survey. Two survey e-reminders were sent: one on 28 June and a second one on 9 July. The closing date for survey completion was 15 July 2012 in order to accommodate any staff holidays and the period in which the majority of Boards of Examiners were held.

Using the e-survey in the manner described above ensured that respondents *"could complete the questionnaire in private … in familiar surroundings … and avoid pressure from the researcher's presence..."* (Cohen et al. 2011, p.404). However, the disadvantage of this approach was that I was not available to address any queries or problems regarding the interpretation of the questions (ibid. 2011). Nevertheless, the simple style of the survey

questions employed (discussed below) went some way to addressing this issue and this is mentioned in the discussion of validity later in this chapter.

It was likely that most academic-related staff would not be required to design modules as part of their working role. Thus the questionnaire instructed staff that if they were not involved in module design they need not continue with the survey. However, a number of academic-related staff teach short supplementary courses, such as librarians, and this is why the cohort as a whole was included in the sample.

As suggested by Robson (2002, p.250) the first follow-up email reminding staff of the survey was the most productive prompt in increasing the response rate. Forty-two members of staff responded to the initial mailing and this increased to 87 after the first reminder. The second and final reminder raised the number of responses to 96. This pattern was evidenced in the number of people who expressed an interest in being interviewed. For example 18 respondents volunteered during the first mailing - this increased to 33 after the first reminder and to 37 following the second one. The response rate is discussed next.

4.3.5 The response rate

As stated above, the number of survey respondents was 96. The questionnaire data revealed that 14 respondents stated that they held academic-related posts (see Appendix 10, Table 1). The last survey question had invited respondents to express their interest in participating in a follow-up interview. As highlighted in Table 2, 37 of the 96 survey respondents responded positively, and 23 were interviewed. This is discussed in section 4.4.4.The above response rates were not disappointing, as other surveys have experienced similar levels of participation. For example, when using an e-questionnaire to investigate academic staff attitudes towards implementing inclusive teaching practice, Smith (2010) received 83 completed questionnaires (out of 750 originally sent to teaching staff at a UK university). In justifying her findings she conceded that *"the number of returned questionnaires were small but was large enough to run basic frequencies*

from" (Smith 2010, p.217). This was also the case for my research. Aznar-Minguet et al. (2011, p.151) distributed an e-questionnaire concerning the introduction of sustainability into university curricula to 3,220 university teachers at the University of Valencia. In all, 331 questionnaires were returned (representing a response rate of just over 10%). They found that their respondents were representative according to *"years of teaching, gender or administrative status"* (ibid. p.151). Lastly, Goos and Hughes (2010, p.317), in their online survey of university course coordinators, received 308 responses from the original 930 sent (a 33% response rate). Their e-survey used likert scales but also asked for open-ended responses. A demographic analysis of their data confirmed that the respondents represented all schools and faculties and had varied levels of appointment and teaching and coordination experience.

The response rate to this survey was a fraction over 10% (see Table 2) and 37 of these survey respondents expressed an interest in participating in a follow-up interview. The survey response rate limits how far the findings of this study can be generalized. However, like the studies above, responses came from a representative mix of academic and academic-related staff. For example, and whilst the questionnaires were completed anonymously, the resulting data suggested that respondents were not skewed towards any group concerning length of tenure and design experience and this is demonstrated in Chapter 5 via a number of demographic tables. This became more evident when the volunteers were interviewed.

In addition, it should be remembered why the questionnaire was employed in this project. The key issue is that I never intended to rely fully on the questionnaire data. It was useful for what it is, but the more important role of the questionnaire was as a tool to provide access to potential interviewees for the qualitative work. This has already been discussed above, and there is no doubt that this initial form of data collection achieved its aims by providing an initial insight into the experiences of staff involved in module design and in helping to determine the format of the interview schedule that was used in the later interviews (see Table 3 in section 4.4.3).

4.3.6 Validity

In this research, validity has more to do with whether or not the data was viable; the data was not tested for validity and reliability. Therefore throughout this section it is the credibility of the data that is being discussed, not experimental validity.

The credibility of the data produced from the questionnaire was improved because it was completed anonymously, it allowed for open answers as well as closed ones and because the sample was representative of the population of staff who design, review and redesign modules (Cohen et al. 2011, p.209). For the latter issue, the cohort of staff who completed the questionnaire consisted of staff that exhibited varying levels of experience, length of tenure, exposure to in-house training programmes and job title. Cohen et al. (ibid. p.198) suggests that threats to credibility can also be minimized by choosing an appropriate time-scale for the administration of the questionnaire, avoiding any ambiguity of instructions and ensuring that the survey is appropriate (e.g. not too easy or difficult) for the respondents. Thus, and as mentioned in the previous section, I deliberately disseminated the questionnaire after the summer Board of Examiners meetings, when teaching had ceased but before the main holiday period when people tended to take annual leave. I also stressed how easy the questionnaire was to complete, that it was short in length, and that it didn't take long to complete.

In line with Cohen et al.'s (2011) guidance, it has already been discussed that I took steps to avoid the non-return of questionnaires by sending timely reminders. As I had also received a number of emails from people who thanked me for giving them the opportunity to participate in the project (two people said that this was the first time that they had been offered the chance to do so), I used this expressed motivation to ensure that I retained as many interview volunteers as I could, by avoiding a delay between completion of the questionnaire and scheduling the interviews. In fact the time period between these two events was less than two months, during which I made contact with the volunteers so as to maintain their interest.

This stage of the project highlighted that insider research can offer members of the institution/organisation a conduit to voice and reflect on issues and subjects that they have perhaps never had the opportunity to talk about before (although it is accepted that other types of research can do this too). Indeed, Edwards observed that during the process of his research *"Several teachers commented that they simply had no time for such conversations with colleagues in the daily hurly-burly of teaching and were glad of the chance to do so in this research ..."* (2002, p.79). In this project, this was something that was raised during the latter stages of data collection. For example, following their interviews six participants said that they were really pleased that they had volunteered as they had never been given the opportunity to talk about this aspect of their work before.

4.3.7 Analysing the quantitative data

The resulting quantitative data was analysed by using some of the analytical options provided by the 'Bristol-online' survey tool. Whilst it is acknowledged that BOS automatically generates output it is the researcher's role to actively look for patterns and things of interest and as such I had control over how I manipulated the filters and the cross-tabulations. Three of the 'Bristol-online' options were chosen: 'show incomplete surveys' (as not everyone completed all of the survey due to a filter question), 'cross-tabulate whole survey' (the whole survey was cross-referenced against questions 1-17), and 'survey overview' (the results from the survey were presented question by question). In addition, and prior to the analysis of the data, question 18 (which asked if respondents would like to participate in a 'follow up' survey) was excluded from the data analysis by filtering the responses to this question (i.e. the volunteer's details) away from the overall results. As the survey population was small, it was more appropriate when analysing the resulting data to use the number of respondents with a particular response in addition to employing a percentage score (Denscombe 2003).

One useful feature of the 'Bristol-online' package was that the resulting data was automatically anonymised and aggregated as the survey progressed,

which supported reassurances of anonymity made to the survey population in the introductory letter, and satisfied the ethical requirements surrounding participant identification. This feature also helpfully dispensed with the need for data coding and input. There is no doubt that not having to manually input the raw data both speeded up the process of analysis and also (by avoiding human error) allowed for more accurate results.

The majority of the questions offered multiple-choice options which were consistent with the objective nature of the survey. For most of them, only one tick box answer was required. However, for the following five questions respondents could tick as many boxes as they wished:

Q9. *'Is your practice of module design influenced by ….'*;

Q10. *'Think of your most recent experience: when you are designing curricula do you use any of the following 'aids' to help you? Tick up to three that are most important to you'*;

Q14. *'Using your most recent experiences, which of the following factors do you take into account when you think about the type of assessment that you will use for the module?*'

Q14a. *'Which of the above (if any) are the most important to you? Write up to two factors.*'

Q15a (following on from Q15 – *'Have you ever wanted to change the design of a module but did not go through with it?'*) *'If you can remember, what stopped you from making the change?*'

These questions also included an optional 'other' box in the event that the respondents' answer was not included in the formatted response list. Here staff could elaborate on their answer (if they wished) and this option produced a good number of qualitative responses. An 'other' box was also included in Q11: *'Only answer this question if you have experience of writing a new module. Using your most recent experience – whereabouts on the module descriptor template do you start?'* This question also elicited a

number of qualitative responses. The ‘open’ questions were revisited in the qualitative interviews but the initial responses were manually analysed by combining the data and subsequently grouping it into themes. These are discussed in Chapter 6 (The Discussion of the Qualitative Data).

The completed questionnaires could only be accessed by myself and were password protected. Question 18 of the e-survey asked respondents who would be interested in participating in a follow-up interview to supply their email address so that they could be contacted at a later date. The respondents who did not leave their email addresses were completely anonymous, as BOS does not reveal any personal details of the participant. However to comply with the assurances of anonymity for the 32 respondents who did leave their email addresses, BOS permits a filter to be used whereby the responses to one or more questions can be excluded from the results. Thus when the data was exported, question 18 (which asked for the email addresses of volunteers) was removed by applying the filter. This resulted in a considerable amount of aggregated data but with no email addresses attached. The Bristol online support service had been consulted about this matter and it was they who advised that a filter could be used. In addition, I was able to filter the results so that a separate a list of volunteer interviewee email addresses was printed, but without any other data attached. Only I had access to the questionnaire data and the list of volunteer interviewees.

However, just before his interview, one of the participants asked for a copy of their completed questionnaire. In checking to see if the questionnaire could be located, I discovered that the filters were not permanently applied, and therefore the completed questionnaires (with email addresses if respondents had supplied these in order to be interviewed) could be seen if necessary. I initially wondered if the statement in the initial email to staff (concerning anonymity) had been breached (although of course the issue only concerned the respondents who had volunteered their email address as the other respondents could not be identified at all). After asking BOS if I could permanently delete the responses for question 18, their reply was that the only way to delete this information was to delete the whole questionnaire.

However they also added that one of the ways to deal with this problem was to restrict access to the data. The matter was discussed at a supervisory meeting, and it was decided that, as only I had access to the data, there had been no breach of anonymity. As I had sole access to the data and no one else knew my passwords the issue of anonymity could be easily managed.

Whilst the questionnaire survey produced an initial insight into the practice of module design by giving a sense of whether or not people are influenced by curriculum design models, and by highlighting elements of individual module design practice, it also helped me to decide what would be explored in the interviews. However the qualitative element of the research did carry the heavier weighting regarding importance within the project. This was a result of the huge amount of rich data that emerged from the interviews. Nevertheless, the results of the data that emerged from the questionnaire survey were useful, and as a result these are included in chapters five and six as they provided concise and easily digestible outcomes that were helpful in addressing the research questions.

The process of designing and administering the qualitative interviews is discussed next.

4.4 Part Two: The qualitative interviews

4.4.1 Designing the interview schedule – developing the questions

When the interview schedule was being drafted, the analytical method had not been finally decided as two methods were being considered. These were 'thematic analysis' (TA) and 'interpretative phenomenological analysis' (IPA). Thematic analysis offered something for the insider researcher by encoding qualitative data and IPA offered a deeper and more interpretive approach to the data than TA by making sense of the personal (or lived) experiences of a particular phenomenon. Both TA and IPA are, in effect, thematic analyses but IPA is a specialised form of TA that is theoretically bound to phenomenology. Thus not reaching a decision concerning the method of analysis (at this stage) did not compromise the design of the schedule as both employed very

similar methods which could be used to theme the data in the initial stages of analysis. After the completion of these first steps I decided which method would be used and the next section explains how I decided this.

4.4.2 Thematic analysis and interpretive phenomenological analysis

As mentioned above, the initial steps of thematic analysis and interpretive phemonological analysis (IPA) are not dissimilar. Both use an approach in the initial stages of analysis whereby *"The themes may be generated inductively from the raw information or generated deductively from theory and prior research"* (Boyatzis 1998, p.4). However, unlike thematic analysis and grounded theory, there is often an emphasis in classical IPA on the intricacies of the spoken data. For example pauses, speech dynamics and mis-hearings are included as part of the analysis as well as any psychological concepts (Biggerstaff and Thompson 2008). However, this is not to give the impression that IPA is discourse analysis (i.e. how language is used) as IPA and discourse analysis are very different.

Without influencing the decision of whether IPA or thematic analysis would be the more helpful approach, the interviews were a hybrid of 'topical interviews' and 'cultural interviews' (Rubin and Rubin 2012, p.31) in which the *"researcher looks for specific facts, descriptions of events or examples, or examples that will help answer a particular, focused research question"* and where *"the researcher tries to understand the norms, rules, and values that underlie people's behaviour …"* (ibid. p.31). This style of interview was appropriate to either of the two methods of analysis discussed above and was instrumental in eliciting the rich data that emerged from the interviews.

There is no single way of conducting IPA. Indeed Smith and Osborne (2007) (in Smith 2007) suggest that as you proceed you may find yourself adapting the method to your own particular way of working and the particular topic you are investigating. However, traditional IPA is often used to analyse data from a small number of people. For example Reid et al. (2005) suggest that there should be no more than 15 persons and those participants are selected via purposive sampling methods. It has already been explained that 23 people

were interviewed in this project (which is considerably more than the recommended maximum number of participants for IPA) and that everyone who wanted to be interviewed was included. Nevertheless, there are IPA studies where a similar number of interviews as this project have been conducted. For example in Stein et al.'s (2011) phenomenological study of e-learning, out of the 37 volunteers, 20 interviewees were selected, and in Orsmond and Merry's research (2011) on feedback alignment between tutors and students there were 25 interviewees, but these studies use the more traditional forms of IPA (mentioned above). Despite this, in the event the more classic styles of IPA (see Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009) were set aside as these are more strongly associated with studies and research projects within psychology and my approach is more akin to interdisciplinary social sciences.

Whilst the first few stages of thematic analysis proved to be useful (e.g. developing the thematic codes) I struggled with the latter stages promoted by Boyatzis (1998) because I was interested in the experiences of the respondents and was open to whatever they said, rather than being bound by a theory or conceptual theory. I did want to adopt an interpretive analytical method and some of the analytical steps of thematic analysis had helped me, such as the methodical way of drawing up the themes and master themes of the data. Thus I drew upon those. However, I was aware of the limitations (for my research) of the latter phases of this type of analysis, and I felt that nothing was emerging from them. For example, I considered that if I had focussed completely on a presumed theory, the lived experiences of my interviewees would have been at best diluted, and at worst lost in the process. To overcome this, I drew on another approach to allow me to get to work with the data. I decided to inductively analyse the transcripts by using a hybrid process of theming that *leant* towards Interpretive Phenomological Analysis (IPA). The process used to do this is discussed in section 4.4.9 but for now, I can disclose that I used a lighter form of IPA in which the thematic analysis was informed by the interpretive phenomenological approach. I was

aiming for interpretive and conceptual theming rather than performing TA at the other end of the spectrum, which is as objective content analysis.

4.4.3 The interview schedule

To determine which questions should be asked, the interview schedule had been partly influenced by the questionnaire responses (particularly the open ended and more qualitative ones), previous studies in this field, theoretical underpinnings and the research questions. Table 3 sets out the interview schedule and presents a brief rationale for including each question:

Table 3: The interview schedule

Interview schedule (semi-structured). (The questions may be subject to change as the interview progresses)
Think of a module that you have designed, reviewed or redesigned recently – how do you start the process? At this stage of the interview I was building on the related questions from the questionnaire survey which concerned the influences upon module design and the choice of assessment, and which design tools or aids that staff used.
What are you trying to achieve in designing a module? The literature review had suggested that design approaches were not always consistent or logical. This question was asked to explore if, despite this assumed phenomenon, the aims of module designers were consistent.
Which audience(s) do you have in mind for the documents that you might produce? This question was influenced by Bamber et al.'s (2009) socio-cultural theoretical approach to enhancement.
What do you see as the pressures or constraints that influence or affect the way that you design or redesign a module? This question had been influenced by the work written by Cross (2009), Coria (2010) and the JISC projects discussed in the literature

review.
If you have a teaching qualification that incorporates elements of curriculum design – does it help you in your practice? If people had a teaching qualification it was more likely that they had been explicitly exposed to design models.
Re-capping the survey - when do you plan the assessment aspects of your module(s)? This question had been guided by the design models discussed in the literature review.
How important are your professional and even social relationships with fellow academics, professionals, managers and /or students when designing modules? This question was influenced by the theoretical work by Bamber et al. (2009). I was interested to find out if design experiences were more individual or collaborative in nature (or a mixture of both).
Are there any issues in module design which you would like to mention which we have not mentioned so far? This was asked in order to give interviewees the opportunity to talk about design experiences that had not been prompted by the previous questions.

I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews (rather than structured or unstructured interviews) because of the degree of control that I could exert over this form of data collection. Semi-structured interviews offer a good compromise (especially for inexperienced interviewers like myself) in that *"... many of the specific questions are formulated as the interview proceeds, in response to what the interviewee says"* (Rubin and Rubin 2012, p.31). In structured interviews the questions are rigidly fixed and thus I felt that this method would be too restrictive, in that I would not be able to alter the order of the questions if I thought that some change to the schedule was appropriate. In addition, I would not have been able to omit unnecessary

questions or to add any that would help me to elicit people's experiences of module design and redesign. I would also not have been able to give explanations of the questions (if necessary) or to change the words according the interviewee's circumstances (Robson 2002, p.270). In unstructured interviews, *"many of the specific questions are formulated as the interview proceeds"* (Rubin and Rubin 2012, p.31) which meant that there was a chance that the interviews would lose their consistency.

4.4.4 Conducting the interviews – participant sampling

At the end of the e-questionnaire, respondents were asked if they would like to participate in a follow-up interview. Thirty-seven people volunteered but five of them did not leave their contact details. On 23 July 2012 (one week after the survey had closed) a 'thank-you' posting was placed on the University 'Staff Briefing' (see Appendix 3)**.** This was used to thank staff who had participated in the survey and to ask if these five respondents could contact me with their names. Unfortunately no one did so the pool of volunteers was reduced to 32.

The ethics application had proposed that the maximum number of interviews would be 30 and that, if more than 30 positive responses were received, quota sampling would be used to reduce the total number of interviewees. However, due to the anticipated 'drop-off', everyone (who wanted to be) was interviewed, because the number of people who responded to the follow-up mails was 23. This dispensed with the need to actively sample the pool of volunteers.

The interview volunteers were sent follow-up information via email between 19 July and 20 July 2012 (see Appendix 4). This loosely outlined the proposed timetabling and format of the interviews and outlined ethical protocols including consent. They were also told that they would be contacted again in September 2012 with further details of the interview schedule (i.e. questions) and some proposed dates for interview. It was already evident by the survey invitation that I was a member of staff at the university.

Twenty of the interviewees responded to the first e-invitation by agreeing to be interviewed, and 4 responded after the second e-invitation. A copy of the email sent to prospective interviewees can be viewed in Appendix 5. All prospective interviewees were invited for interview during September and October 2012 (although the interviews continued into January 2013). If there was no response to the second invitation, people were not contacted again as I did not want to nag people into participation. In the event, eight people did not respond to either of the invitations. In addition, one of the 'booked-in' interviewees did not turn up (the person did not make any contact to explain why) and this reduced the number of interviews to 23.

4.4.5 Piloting

Before meeting the first interviewee, two pilot interviews were conducted. These interviewees were colleagues who had told me that they had completed the questionnaire but had not volunteered to being interviewed. They were also experienced PhD supervisors and doctoral examiners so they were in a good position to give sound constructive criticism. The pilot interviews resulted in a few very minor modifications being made to the schedule (these concerned grammatical changes and a little re-wording to enhance clarity) but the resulting data was not included in the data analysis.

4.4.6 The interviewees

All of the interviewees were academic staff. Ten of the interviewees were known to me and eight of these worked within various divisions within the same School as me (which consists of approximately 120 staff) but only one was a colleague who worked on the same programme as myself. Three people were loose acquaintances from different University Schools. All of the respondents were treated equally, they were all asked the same questions and I interviewed all staff who wanted to take part in this stage of the research.

There were five different Schools at the time that the research was executed (from October 2014 these were known as Faculties). From the opening

interview question (which asks interviewees to describe their role in the University) it is known that there were at least two interviewees from each School, each having varying experiences, length of tenure, security of tenure and teaching/administrative responsibilities (see Table 4 for general non-identifying information about the interviewees).

Table 4: General information about the interviewees (n=23)

Role in module design	
Programme Leader and Module Leader	10
Module Leader	13
Number of years teaching	
1-2	4
3-4	6
5-6	4
7+	9
Discipline Area	
Social Sciences and Humanities	12
Health	6
Life Sciences, Engineering and Computing	3
Management and Law	2
Having a teaching qualification	
Yes	14
No	9

4.4.7 Executing the interviews

About a week before their appointment each interviewee was sent a copy of the informed consent form (see Appendix 6) and the interview schedule. When the interviewees arrived at their pre-arranged meeting, 18 of them said that they had not looked at the schedule beforehand (all citing work commitments and a lack of available time) but this didn't prevent the interviews flowing well.

The issue of anonymity was discussed during the process of informed consent and this was executed just before each interview started. To try to ensure anonymity, individual, module and degree programme names (or

equivalent) were removed from the interview transcripts and this was communicated to participants. As I transcribed, themed and analysed the interview data by hand, I knew the origin of every transcript in my head. This was essential because initially I was interested in whether or not experiences were different between different subject areas, but it will be seen in the discussion and results chapters that there were no distinct differences in the types of responses given.

I had informed all the potential interviewees that they would not be identified to anyone else. In this project, there were eight instances where it was made clear to me that I was being told what was perceived to be sensitive (but not sensationalist) information. However, three of these interviewees explicitly stated that they trusted me with their identity, and it is assumed that the remaining five interviewees must have felt the same; otherwise they would not have told me what they did.

As mentioned above, all of the interviews were semi-structured, which enabled me to exert some control in the data collection. The list of questions was identically asked for each interviewee, but not necessarily in the same order. Probes were employed so that interviewees could elaborate and explain their responses where necessary, and also when I needed to clarify and check the understanding of something, especially if a response was inconsistent with something mentioned earlier. This is a quality issue as it is about member checking, i.e. reflecting back to participants to make sure you have understood.

Now and again a follow-up question was used to explore an issue that the interviewee had raised, especially if it was particular to their discipline or module. For example, if a respondent stated that they employed a very specific approach to module design (not all of the respondents did) they were additionally asked if this approach was consistent or if it had changed over time. Follow-up questions were also occasionally employed if the interviewees contradicted literature that I had read or belied my own conceptions of the design process (Rubin and Rubin 2012, p.152) and these

were used to clarify things. However, this approach was not used to challenge the truth-value of what participants said. It did not matter if the interviewees reported experiences that deviated from my own experiences or challenged accepted wisdoms in the field. All that mattered was the expression of that experience. Thus the follow-up questions were employed where an interesting pause for thought arose, but they were not used to check the worth or value or objective truth of what participants said.

Likewise, there were instances where a question was omitted. For example if an interviewee did not have a teaching qualification, I did not ask them if their qualification was useful when designing or enhancing modules. The most frequently used 'probes' and follow-up questions are listed in Table 5.

Table 5: The most frequently used additional questions and probes used in the semi-structured interviews (the standard question is in bold)**:**

Think of a module that you have designed, reviewed or redesigned recently – how do you start the process? Probes: design aids, social/pedagogic influences. Follow-up questions: do you consistently follow this approach; has your approach changed over time? Get them to talk about something that they have really engaged in. Would their approach be different if they were asked to produce something for the next day?
What are you trying to achieve? Follow up questions: how much does your choice of practice come through the overall experience? E.g. does the teaching element throw up issues that persuade you to change things?
Which audience(s) do you have in mind for the documents that you might produce? Probe: the student body.
What do you see as the pressures or constraints that influence or affect the way that you design or redesign a module? Follow up question: how do you reconcile or balance these pressures?
If you have a teaching qualification that incorporates elements of curriculum design – does it help you in your practice? Probe: need to know the nature of the qualification; what did this training involve; what did you gain from it (or not)**.**
Re-capping the survey - when do you plan the assessment aspects of your module(s)? Follow up question: how do you decide on the assessment(s); when do you do this; have you tried any other way; what are the constraints on your practice and do you deal with them; is this something that has changed over time?

This stage of the project was sensitive, as respondents were asked how they approached one aspect of their job description. It was therefore possible that they might have felt that their practice was being judged or investigated. Because of this, and so as to minimize the risk of resistance, questions were raised in a gentle, non-critical and non-confrontational manner. I used a style of qualitative interviewing known as 'responsive interviewing' (Rubin and Rubin 2012). This *"emphasizes the importance of building a relationship of trust between the interviewer and interviewee that leads to more give and take in the conversation. The tone of questioning is basically friendly and gentle, with little confrontation"* (ibid. p.36). The completed questionnaires were not used during the interviews, but one interviewee requested to see their questionnaire prior to the interview. This raised an ethical issue which was discussed earlier in this chapter.

The first additional question (see Table 5 above) was a 'tour question' (ibid. 2012, p.137) which provided *"a broad description of their activities … to talk in general terms about how they handle some particular matter, or to present their knowledge about what steps occur in a process ...".* One additional question asked interviewees if their design approach would be different if they had to work under extreme time pressure (it later transpired that five interviewees had been asked to perform under these conditions).

Interviewees were also asked to make comparisons between their experiences of tweaking (enhancing) or designing modules for which they felt that they had relevant subject expertise, compared to modules that they had no previous experience of working with and which were further away from their core research or professional interests. The rest of the questions focused on experiences of module design, and in particular what situations or contexts influenced these experiences (Creswell 2007, p.61).

To aid the collection of 'rich' data, interviewees were asked to provide examples of practice in order to illustrate their experiences. The last interview question, which asked if there was anything else that respondents wished to discuss, was used to *"tone down the emotional and intellectual level...*

without losing the openness of the discussion" (Rubin and Rubin 2012, p.111). It should be noted that much of the probing and follow-up questioning was easily facilitated due to my tacit knowledge. For example when I asked interviewees what they saw as the pressures that influenced or affected the way that they designed or redesigned a module, I wanted to know if such constraints were reconciled. If they were (and my own practice had taught me that they could be) then I hoped that participants would share how this was done. If they weren't, then I wanted to know why.

Indeed, each interviewee, whether they were known to me or not, or whether they were one of the first or last people to be interviewed, were treated and spoken to in the same way. I adopted the same view as Platt in which she stated that *"... one is anxious that the interviews should not be a socially unpleasant occasion, and that one should appear well in the eyes of people who constitute a significant reference group and with whom one will continue to live when the research is over"* (1981, p.77). Unlike Platt's (1981) experience, the interviews were not 'acutely embarrassing'. In fact the dialogue became less rigid and provided a fertile environment for data gathering.

However, this does raise the issue of how I understood peoples' responses. Did I, when I was sitting with the interviewees, actually appreciate what the interviewee was saying or did I assume that I did? In addition, did the interviewees presume that I would know what they were referring to? In the majority of instances I did know what people were talking about; for example when certain words or acronyms were used (e.g. 'PEPs', 'module descriptor', or PDs) I knew exactly what was being referred to. There was no need to ask for clarification; indeed it was felt that to do so (especially with familiar interviewees) would be irritating, as they knew that I would know what they were talking about. However, Platt argues that *"Where it is assumed that norms are shared, their rationale and content do not need explanation, and thus the data become thinner ..."* (1981, p.82). I did not find this to be true: as less explanation was required to explain words and terms, more information (and a greater depth of detail) could be elicited within the time allocated for

the interview. It also meant that interviewees could talk at length without interruptions, which helped to maintain the smooth flow of the interview. However, there were instances where certain language was unfamiliar, especially when interviewees were from a 'hard science' background and were referring to terms used in external professional practice. In these situations, I asked for clarification.

Eighteen of the interviewees admitted that they didn't have the time to read the schedule before the interview. They were thus talking 'off the cuff', and without prepared answers. In addition, I had considered whether people would tell me what they thought I wanted to hear. In the event ‘though I felt that people had told me 'how it was' for them. However, and in line with Platt's research, it will be seen later in this thesis that *“... people freely revealed many things that fell short of recognized good practice”* (ibid. p.81). I was aware that people could have used the interviews as a conduit for revealing potentially contentious or embarrassing information concerning institutional activities. I was also aware that *“people can hold contradictory views simultaneously, and both may be true in the sense that the interviewees believe them both”* (Rubin and Rubin 2012, p.67). However, I did not sense that people were lying to me or that they were using the interviews for their own agenda. If I had, then this would have raised a quality issue.

Brannick and Coghlan have suggested that *“When insider researchers are interviewing, they may assume too much and do not probe as much as if they were outsiders or ignorant of the situation”* (2007, p.65). This is linked to the issue of my tacit knowledge concerning language and practice. However, there are further perceived problems with interviews conducted within familiar territory, and these are related to the assumed familiarity that researchers have with their interviewees, or with the organization that is being studied.

From the outset of this project, interviewees were told (via the pre-interview information) that the structure of the interview would be steered by their responses and I had always planned to say very little during the interviews.

Indeed some of the published literature warns interviewers against revealing their own opinions and stances and encourages the researcher to sit on the fence (Mercer 2007). However, Mercer also cites Hawkins (1990, p.417) who *"... found that sometimes he had to give information in exchange for what he wanted from informants"* (Hawkins, 1990 cited in Mercer 2007, p.10). This was not what I experienced and, as I have highlighted previously, by taking a secondary role during the interview I discovered more than I originally expected or planned to. Thus I ensured (by saying very little) that my opinions and views did not steer the interviews. The only times that I deviated from the original intentions of the interview schedule were: when an interviewee needed reassurance of confidentiality, or if I was asked for clarification of a question (which did not happen often).

There is an issue around how much one reveals to an interviewee about the project before and after the interview. This is something that all researchers need to think about and Mercer (2007, p.21) discusses this at length by stating that *"Researchers need to avoid 'contaminating' their study 'by informing subjects too specifically about the researcher questions to be studied*". This is particularly important when the interviewer does not 'walk away' when the research is over. In my research, there were eight occasions where, following the interview, I was asked what it was that 'I was looking for' and had they (the interviewee) been helpful. On each occasion I told the interviewee that their contribution had been very useful but I avoided talking about anything else connected to the research. But for all this, Anderson et al. 1994 (cited in Brannick and Coghlan 2007, p.66) suggest that insider research *"is typically disqualified because it is perceived not to conform to standards of intellectual rigour, because insider researchers have a personal stake and substantive emotional investment in the setting"*. However, it can also be argued that insider research can be credible and trustworthy. These issues are discussed in section 4.4.12.

The interviews were digitally recorded and took place on University premises. None of the interviewees objected to being recorded, but one interviewee specifically requested that their recording be deleted following transcription.

This is standard practice and so I did what had been asked of me. Although interviewees were given the choice of where to meet, 14 of them chose to meet at my office. The vast majority of these people worked in shared offices, which might have explained their choice of interview location. Interviewees who asked me to visit them all had their own office and thus, like those who came to my office, they were able to talk to me privately and without being disturbed.

With the exception of two interviews, all were conducted by 12 December 2012. Due to the teaching commitments of one interviewee, and a sabbatical for the other, two interviews took place in January 2013. This did not have any adverse effect on the project.

The interview questions were asked in a consistent manner, although the questions occasionally changed order, particularly when the interviewee gave information concerning a future question. I adopted an interviewing pattern which Rubin and Rubin (2012, p.123) describe as a *"main branches of a tree interview structure"* whereby *"you divide the research problem into roughly equal parts and plan to cover each part with a main question (a branch)".* Rubin and Rubin describe various other interviewing structures, such as the 'opening the floodgates' approach whereby the interviewee is naïve about the research issue, and the 'river and channel' method which is used in a more unstructured interview schedule. However, I came to the conclusion that the first strategy was the most appropriate method for this study as it offered consistency without rigidity.

4.4.8 Transcribing the interview data

Interviewees were interviewed randomly and according to each person's availability. However, by the sixth interview (I was transcribing each interview shortly after its occurrence) a number of themes were emerging, such as time pressures, limited resources, institutional policy and practice and student needs. These were identified on each transcript using coloured text, indicating where there were any overlapping themes (see Appendix 7 for a coded transcript). As mentioned previously, the interviews involved staff from

different faculties who were involved in both professionally- and non-professionally validated degree programmes and who had varying experience in module design. One observation made during the course of transcribing was that the emerging themes were not specific to any one group of staff. However, the fact that I started to analyse the interview transcripts before finishing all of the interviews had no influence over how subsequent interviews were conducted as I was satisfied that the already emergent data was sufficiently deep and rich enough to address the research questions.

The shortest interview lasted just under 18 minutes and the longest was just over 54 minutes. Most of them were around 35 minutes in duration. However, with the exception of two interviews, the shorter recordings produced as much data as the longer ones, as these interviewees spoke very quickly. Thus the quantity of data in this context refers to the amount of words spoken, and the emerging number of pages which formed the resulting transcript. In fact it was these 'shorter' interviews that took the longest to transcribe as the playback of the recorder had to be paused many times.

To facilitate anonymity, identifying details of the interviewees were removed from the transcripts. This included all names of persons, modules, degree programmes and academic schools. In addition, geographical details were removed such as the location of any employers involved in the process of module design. Occasionally, the descriptions of the types of assessment used in a module were removed as some assessments are only used in particular programmes of study. In addition, the supervision team were asked to check for traceability when reading my draft work.

Each recording was transcribed by hand following interview and marginal notes were made at the same time. Ezzy (2002, p.70) suggests that this approach *"encourages detailed reflection on the issues of the research … Transcription served as a preliminary form of data analysis"*. In the short run, and whilst being an interesting experience, this was also a time-consuming stage of the project. However, it was deemed to be the right way to transcribe

the data *for me,* rather than using transcribing software such as the 'Dragon Speech Software'. This was because, despite listening actively to the interviewees, it was only by listening to the data and transcribing it fully and methodically that I could wholly engage with what had been said. I was also keen not to 'cherry pick' the data by selecting only what I thought could be relevant passages and statements. Transcribing the data continuously and promptly also ensured that the task was kept manageable and did not result in a backlog of work to be done. Double checking the transcriptions and, at a later stage, checking with the interviewees that what was going to be included in the thesis *was* an accurate capture of what was said strengthened the credibility of the research (Rubin and Rubin 2012).

4.4.9 Analysing the interview data

Once all of the interviews had been conducted and transcribed, the transcripts were divided into three almost equal bunches of transcripts. They were divided in the order of the interviews. Thus the first bunch consisted of transcripts 1-8, the second were transcripts 9-16, with the remaining transcripts assigned to bundle three. I then read through each bundle in order to get a feel for the responses. This initial stage of analysis commenced in March 2013 and was a process of identifying the initial themes within the data (see Appendix 8) whereby *"the researcher attempts to build a systematic account of what has been observed and recorded"* (Ezzy 2002, p.86). In this study each transcript was treated in its own right and marginal notes were written to help the emergence of the themes and ideas which would inform the later conceptual stage of the analysis. Two of the transcripts (numbers 3 and 18) were given to each of the supervision team (three people) so that they could also comment on their initial interpretations of the data. This was a necessary stage of the data analysis process as, being an insider researcher, I was unable to benefit from peer 'coding groups' whereby coding occurs as a group activity. This was because peer coding groups tend to occur amongst the postgraduate student community and I thought that it would be inappropriate to discuss staff interview data (which discussed the

student population to a certain extent) with students. I also refrained from discussing the theming process with colleagues, as it was possible that they could have participated in the anonymous questionnaire.

Approaches to IPA offer an examination of 'lived experiences'. Being of a constructionist nature, in that this was a study of the social construction of things, my research extracted fragments of knowledge. When collecting and analysing the interview data I took a constructionist epistemological approach which is philosophically consistent with interpretivism and phenomenology. Whilst I remained neutral when analysing the data, I brought these extracted fragments together in order to create an epistemology. In other words, people's lived experiences are the reality.

There are differing approaches to phenomenology and these include 'hermeneutic' phenomenology, as advocated by van Manen (1990), and 'transcendental or psychological' phenomenology which Moustakas (1994) is associated with. My approach was akin to the hermeneutic approach in which the researcher takes an active role in the process by attempting to familiarise him/herself with the participant's own world (Smith and Osborne (2007) in Smith 2007). However, Smith and Osborne also assert that this approach can be complicated by "... *the researcher's own conceptions; indeed, these are required in order to make sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretative activity. Thus, a two-stage interpretation process, or a double hermeneutic, is involved."* (in Smith 2007 p.53). This contrasts with the approach by Moustakas (1994), which is *"focused less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of the participants"* (Creswell 2007, p.59-60).

Because my analytical approach drew on interpretivism, the issue of my tacit information was part of the process. As Robson suggests, *"the 'conceptual baggage' you bring to your data (whether derived from a pre-existing theory or from an analysis of data collected earlier) will inevitably have some influence on what you are likely to 'see' in the data"* (2002, p.493). To counter this issue, Moustakas discusses the concept of 'bracketing' "... *in which*

investigators set aside their experiences as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective towards the phenomenon under investigation" (Creswell 2007, p.59-60). It is widely acknowledged that bracketing out one's tacit knowledge and own experiences is difficult to do (Moustakas 1994, Koch 1995, Creswell 2007, Foster 2009) and as I am an established employee, it would have been extremely difficult for me to accomplish this successfully. Indeed, van Manen (1990 cited in Creswell 2007, p.62) states that it is impossible to do.

4.4.10 Theming the data

During the initial analytical stage I was open to whatever emerged. Boyatzis states that in the initial stages of thematic analysis one needs to look at how the research sample could affect the findings of the project (1998, p.55). He cites four important factors which will now be discussed in turn. The emphasis will be on how each one impinged upon this project:

1. **Setting:** Boyatzis states that when thinking about the sample population, one should ask: "*Does the context, or setting, have a significant impact on the phenomenon of interest in terms of our ability to obtain a comprehensive picture of it?"* (ibid. p.56).

   This project used an 'organizational setting' (a university) rather than one particular university faculty, department or team of individuals. Taking the University as a whole furnished a better picture of module design and redesign within that university.

2. **Events**: This project did not sample by *"time, by regular social occurrences, or by special occasions/events"* (ibid. p.56) and therefore this had no impact.

3. **People**: In this study, the people who were invited to take part in the questionnaire survey, by virtue of their employment status, could have been involved in module design and redesign. The follow-up interviewees were all involved in module design and redesign.

4. **Social relationships**: This research did not sample the research population by people's relationships to one another and therefore this also had no impact on the findings. However, the study did look at working relationships in the context of collaborative module design.

At this stage of the analysis there were about 30 initial themes written in each list (see Appendix 8) and many of these cropped up in each of the three lists (there was one list for each of the three bundles of transcripts). This was in line with the advice given by Boyatzis (ibid. p.46) to *"compare your summaries to determine similarities among the pieces of information within each sub-sample".*

Subsequent re-readings of the transcripts raised a few themes not considered before and a table of working themes and sub-themes was produced (see Appendix 9). This was a working table of themes, which was subject to change as the analysis of the interview data developed (the final thematic maps are introduced into this thesis towards the end of this chapter).

Boyatzis suggests that *"… researchers must train or discipline themselves to use themes, or codes, reliably ... If you looked at the same event today and tomorrow, would you see it and encode it in the same or a similar way?"* (1998, p.10). One way that I tried to ensure reliability was to ask the supervisory team if they would similarly theme the data (ibid. 1998). Another method was to return to the themes and the analysis at a later time and to re-consider them.

All of the listing, theming, and note taking had been done by hand. By now I was very familiar with the transcripts and the process of analysing the data was mentally beginning to take shape. I hadn't used any computer-assisted analysis because I felt that I could manage the task by myself. Indeed Rubin and Rubin advocate working manually because *"… you can do what the computer program cannot do – that is recognize and give extra weight to a comment ..."* (2012, p.192). Thus, and whilst computer-aided analysis can be

a useful tool for something like content analysis, for example when examining the frequency of words used, it is not so useful for anything that requires interpretive analysis.

The purpose of the master themes and sub-themes set out in Appendix 9 was to enable me to identify which quotations to put under which theme. Throughout the process, any outlying responses were noted and listed separately. As mentioned previously, each theme (or label) was assigned a different colour in order to highlight the relevant text. Where words, sentences or phrases could be attributed to more than one label (at least for the initial phase of analysis) overlapping colours were used. Finally, all of the relevant quotations were 'cut and pasted' into a separate word file under each relevant theme.

Boyatzis asserts that in the third stage *"the skill is primarily developed and refined through practice, practice and more practice"* (1998, p.11). The refining of the themes took place during the late spring of 2013. The list of themes was revisited on a number of occasions (spanning over a further period of four weeks) during which I relocated any of the remarks into a more appropriate theme or sub-theme if appropriate, or I deleted any themes/sub-themes if there was replication. On 8 May 2013, a table of nine themes and their corresponding sub-themes was finalised.

In conducting the above process, I had carried out stages 1-4 of IPA (Biggerstaff and Thompson 2008, p.11) in that I had engaged with the text, had identified preliminary themes, had grouped and clustered the themes, and had placed the themes in a summary table.

However, I did not always adhere closely to mechanics of IPA as set out by Smith et al. (2009). For example, whilst I did allow my interviewees to talk uninterrupted, the interviews were steered by the interview schedule and my prompts. In addition, and when analysing the interview data, I didn't use speech dynamics, or note every cough for example. However, and as will be explained in the next section, I did note pauses, laughing, recurring phrases and the mood of the interviewee. In addition, as IPA analysis involves

reading and re-reading the data closely (ibid. 2009) I did make notes of my reflections and thoughts. Whilst I did not use multiple sources of data such as personal diaries or journals that documented thoughts and experiences (Biggerstaff and Thompson, 2008), I did use questionnaire returns where open, qualitative data had been provided by the respondent.

4.4.11 Interpreting the themes

The next stage of the analysis was to compare the contents of each of the word files (see above) by looking for any similarities or variations within the data. This stage of analysis was descriptive but to generate more insight I thought about what relationships, circumstances, traits, or institutional processes could explain people's experiences of module design and redesign. I also looked for any links, not only within the data, but also to any previous studies (Rubin and Rubin 2012, p.207). Cresswell states that in IPA this is the point at which "*data analysts go through the data (e.g. interview transcriptions) and highlight 'significant statements', sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon ..."* (2007, 61).

Using the table of themes mentioned above, I manually identified where in each transcript examples (using the relevant quotations) of each theme could be found by writing a few key words from the particular quote which also included the line and page number of the corresponding transcript. IPA is an interpretative method of analysis, and I identified themes that encapsulated the essence of each interview. At this point, psychological concepts can be employed in the analysis (Biggerstaff and Thompson 2008, p.10) but as this project was not conducted within the discipline of psychology I did not do this.

The themes, sub-themes and selected quotations were then used not only to describe the interviewees' experiences, but they were also used, as Cresswell suggests to write a *"... a composite description that presents the 'essence' of the phenomenon … Primarily this passage focuses on the common experiences of the participants … the reader should come away*

from the phenomenology with the feeling "I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that" (Polkinghorne 1989, p.46 cited in Cresswell 2007, p.82).

An overview of the data, themes and constructs derived from the process described above is presented and discussed in Chapter 6.

4.4.12 Quality in qualitative research

Cronin-Davis et al. (2009, p.335) have referred to the concept of trustworthiness *"as to the extent to which the resultant research findings are a genuine reflection of the personal lived experiences investigated."* In addition, Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that the value of a research project is determined by its trustworthiness. For them, this is determined by factors which include credibility, transferability and confirmability. Each of these elements will be discussed in view of this research.

Credibility

A number of steps were taken to increase the credibility of this research, and many of these have already been discussed earlier in this chapter. Some of these steps were facilitated because I am an insider researcher. For example I was already familiar with the university of study and had sufficient understanding and knowledge of it (Shenton 2004, p.65). I knew the best time of the academic year to introduce a survey and the most optimal way to facilitate it. Participation in the research was voluntary, staff could opt out at any time, and all the participants knew that their contributions would not put them at risk within the institution (ibid. 2004, p.66). When conducting the interviews I made a mental note if interviewees in comparable positions made any contradictory comments or if they raised points that were peculiar to their discipline (ibid. 2004, p.66). I was always very aware of my role as an insider researcher, and tried (where possible) to use my position in a positive way. One example of this is whereby the insider researcher, accompanied by their tacit knowledge and experience of the organisation, is in a stronger position to identify *"when posturing is taking place"* (Edwards 2002, p.74). I

did not detect any obvious posturing during the interviews that were conducted with staff that I already knew prior to the research. However, there were three instances where I suspected that an interviewee might be 'holding back'. This was not to say that they were being untruthful, but that they were using very careful language. On the other hand, there was also one interviewee who offered a number of very bold and provocative responses. I treated this interview in exactly the same way as all of the others. The interviewee was known to me and I made the judgement that the responses reflected the interviewee's personality, rather than being a deliberate attempt to shock me. This might not have been my opinion had I been an 'outside researcher' with no knowledge of this person. During the data collection and analysis stages there were frequent de-briefing sessions with my supervisory team, which gave the opportunity for alternative approaches, perceptions and explanations to be suggested (Shenton 2004, p.67). Interpretations of the interview data were also checked with corresponding interviewees and the research findings were compared with those from past research studies (ibid. p.69). Thus the findings of other studies are woven into the discussion chapter. In this respect, the research draws on *"the settings and circumstances described by other authors"* (Rubin and Rubin 2012, p.210). Finally, and during the writing up of this thesis, literature review, methodology and data analyses were peer reviewed by anonymous referees prior to journal publication (Shenton 2004, p.67).

Transferability

To increase the trustworthiness of a project, one needs to consider if the methods and the findings could be transferred to other settings, and if they could also be generalized. In Chapter 2, information was given about the university of study. One reason for doing this was to provide enough detail so that the reader could determine if a transfer was reasonable (ibid. 2004, pp.69-70). In addition, a thick description of the subject of interest (module design and redesign) was provided. Together, this helped the reader to judge whether or not the findings arising from this research were also seen in other universities (ibid. 2004, p.70). In addition, a full description, and reflective

account of the methods used in this project were offered (ibid. 2004, p.70) and I was able to trace the route by which I came to my findings via the lists of themes, and the illustrative thematic maps which are presented in Chapter 5 (The Survey Data – a descriptive overview).

This research was conducted within a small sample group and thus there is a question of whether the reported experiences of this small group can be generalized to a larger population. Smith and Osborne (2007) assert that the researcher can *"... report in detail about that particular culture but does not claim to be able to say something about all cultures ..."* (in Smith 2007, p.56). However, this is not to say that the reported experiences could not provide a good starting point for discussion and further research. Indeed, Mathieson's work on university teaching and learning (which used the concept of situated practice) also did not claim to be generalizable, but it did suggest that *"since the issues arising relate to structural factors that have been experienced in different ways across South African universities and across higher education globally, they are likely to have some resonance for considering TLA work group cultures in other contexts"* (2012, p.553).

Confirmability

This was an important consideration as this thesis is the result of insider research. Much effort was made (as explained in the preceding sections) to ensure that the expressed experiences were those of the participants, rather than being the observations and experiences of myself (Shenton 2004, p.72).

In research that uses IPA, reflexivity is important as it demonstrates *"an awareness of the ways in which the researcher as an individual with a particular social identity and background has an impact on the research process"* (Robson 2002, p.172). Throughout this chapter I have acknowledged and described the interaction between myself and the data collected. The practice of bracketing one's own experiences is often employed in reflexiveness and can increase the level of trustworthiness. However, I did not execute this as I was too involved with the practice of module design myself, and as set out in Chapter 1, I embarked on this

project driven by a number of observations concerning both my own practice and that of my colleagues. Thus I asked interviewees if my interpretations of their comments were an accurate reflection of what they said. This practice was well received and appreciated by the interview community. I also considered alternative explanations of the experiences of module design practice that were put to me. In other words, I looked beyond my own experiences (ibid. p.172). These are important observations for researchers who are conducting research within their own organisations and for those using a double hermeneutic approach as issues are often linked to those concerning tacit information and prior personal experiences. For example there is the issue of *"Overlooking the familiar … the very familiarity of the material can produce data blindness or myopia … The material is so commonplace, so normal, so every day for the insider-researcher that the nuances, subtleties and indeed the 'bleeding obvious' can escape observation"* (Edwards 2002, p.77).

However, one consideration was that *"judgements about the robustness of data analysis and conclusions drawn from data are made on the basis of 'insider' knowledge"* (Trowler 2011b, p.3). One of the ways I addressed this was to stay close to the research questions. Trowler confirms this approach by suggesting that *"those who research their own HEIs need to be clear about precisely what their research questions are, what the rationale behind the research design is, and what the truth claims are"* (ibid. p.4). This is because *"... your involvement as an actor means that you may lose the ability to produce good, culturally neutral, 'etic' accounts; you may find it difficult to 'see' some dimensions of social life because they have become normalised for you ..."* (ibid. p.2). To counteract this I employed a number of safeguards. As mentioned previously, I contacted interviewees to check if my interpretation of what they had said was correct. I also looked for any outlying statements that contradicted what other interviewees had said. In addition and, contrary to criticisms of 'insider research', I exploited my own historical, cultural and professional experiences and tacit knowledge to gauge the trustworthiness of the data.

There are other issues which can affect the issue of trustworthiness. For example, the research was entirely conducted by one person. Whilst every stage of the project was discussed with the supervision team, there are documented issues surrounding research projects that have very little external input. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane sum this up by stating that *"... the data were coded and themes identified in the data by one person and the analysis then discussed with a supervisor. This process allowed for consistency in the method but failed to provide multiple perspectives from a variety of people with differing expertise* (2006, pp.80-92).

In addition issues concerning 'projection' and 'mood' are also important. Boyatzis states that projection is the *"reading into or attributing to another person something that is your own characteristic, emotion, value or attitude, or such"* (1998, p.13). Whilst familiarity with the subject was useful when collecting the data, in that little clarification from interviewees was required, the trade-off was, as Boyatzis suggests, that *"it is often difficult for them (the researcher) (to resist their own typical response to the situation"* (ibid. p.13). Boyatzis also suggests that a balance must be struck between the two as *"appropriate levels of familiarity allow useful projection … but not projection to the degree that the researcher 'fills in' the blanks or ambiguous moments"* (ibid. p.13). To provide a balanced discussion of the data I included a wide range of themes, sub-themes and examples. I considered *"alternative interpretations and perspectives"*, and *"to demonstrate thoroughness, look(ed) for gaps and fill(ed) in missing information, seek contrary data, and explore alternative explanations"* (Rubin and Rubin 2012, p.60). Apart from ensuring that I continued to see the data as it actually was, rather than how *I* wanted to see it, one useful exercise was (as mentioned above) to allow the supervisory team to read and comment on two of the transcripts. As there were three supervisors, this was a good opportunity to compare my own thoughts and interpretations with theirs.

The literature acknowledges that tiredness, boredom and other external 'mood factors' can influence the trustworthiness of the themed data (Boyatzis 1998, Rubin and Rubin 2012). To manage this, and to avoid inconsistent

judgements, I took a pragmatic approach by ensuring that if I became aware that I was 'drifting off', lacking concentration or preoccupied with something else, I would stop and take a break. There was always some other productive PhD task (but one requiring less concentration) that could be done.

4.4.13 Handling perceived sensitive data

Because I am an employee, access to potential (and indeed the actual) respondents was easily facilitated and I was *"better able to produce 'emic' accounts (ones meaningful to actors) … better able to use naturalistic data"* because I was *"culturally literate"* (Trowler 2011b, p.2). I was also able to produce what Geertz (1973 cited in Trowler 2011b, p.2) has referred to as *"a thick description of lived realities, of the hermeneutics of everyday life"*.

Thankfully, as an existing practitioner, nothing was said that actually shocked me. In addition, nothing that was disclosed to me was unlawful in nature. Had I been told something that I thought was unlawful, I would have informed the supervisory team immediately, whilst retaining the anonymity of the interviewee, until advice on what to do next was given to me. Two interviewees (mentioned previously) did speak about sensitive matters that Robson (2002, p.70-71) has described as *"practices or conduct which present ethical dilemmas … while not revealing illegal or unlawful activities, may cause concern"* and the content of these interviews is discussed in Chapter 6. However, at the time I found it very difficult to disassociate myself from the effect that the interview had on the interviewee. For a day or so following the interview, I did feel uncomfortable about what I had been told. Whilst I was not surprised by the information given, I felt a sense of protective obligation to the interviewee, as they had been so honest with me. Indeed Platt (1981. p.78) has commented that *"shared community membership is enormously helpful in some ways, but it implies personal relations which carry social obligations that can make the normal impersonal and instrumental use of the interview difficult. This can affect both respondent and interviewer".* In her research *"several respondents expressed embarrassment at revealing things about themselves, or their views of others whom I knew,*

to me". In this project, the two interviewees expressed their surprise at having revealed that particular information, especially in the detail in which it was conveyed. I did not visibly react to the information that was given, but instead maintained the role of interviewer, not one of an acquaintance, colleague or staff member. I can honestly say that every interviewee experienced the same role play.

During the first 'sensitive' interview, and after listening to the interviewee's concerns (the audio recorder was turned off at this point), I initiated a reassuring but gentle conversation and the interviewee left the room in a relaxed manner. Over the next 24 hours, I did think about what had happened and I sent an email to the interviewee thanking them for their contribution and confirming that the interview data had been handled ethically, had been transcribed and had omitted any identifying module, programme and staff names. An email response from the interviewee suggested that s/he was satisfied that the matter had been dealt with appropriately.

Nevertheless, I decided to raise the issue at the next PhD supervisory meeting. Indeed Robson (2002, p.71) has stated that in these situations *"There are no general rules applying to all such situations. In the first instance, they should be discussed with research supervisors or colleagues"*. However just before the meeting, the same type of information was revealed during another interview. In this case, the interviewee became nervous during the course of the interview and asked for reassurance concerning anonymity. It is audio-recorded that this interviewee was also treated ethically and sensitively in that I confirmed that all identifying names of personnel, divisions, schools and the titles of modules and programmes would be deleted when the interview was transcribed. The interviewee was satisfied with this and the interview continued. The next day I decided to email the interviewee to confirm the assurances made during the meeting but as they had specifically raised the issue of anonymity, I said the interview recording could be deleted if the participant wished. The response from the interviewee was one of thanks and that the audio-file need not be deleted. However, this

second incident reminded me that I would come into contact with the interviewees again because we all worked at the same institution. The advice given by Robson (2002) in this situation is that it was not realistic for the researcher to withdraw from any involvement with the people involved and therefore I continued working in the same manner that I always had.

It was agreed amongst the supervisory team that I would remain faithful to the data as the interviews were simply accounts as conveyed by the interviewees, and there was nothing mentioned that was particularly shocking. As stated previously, none of the interviewees revealed anything unlawful, there was no 'gore' and interviewees had given the information by their own free will. The outcome of the situation can be summed up by Robson (2002, p.71): *"...after further thought and discussion you come to the view that what initially disturbed you may be accepted and commonplace in the setting, and perhaps that you are seeking to impose your own values and expectations, whereas the ethical course is to try to seek the understanding of what is going on by 'telling it how it is'... ".*

To conclude from the sections above, I feel that overall my experience as an insider researcher was a good one. The data that was produced from both the questionnaire survey and the qualitative interviews was richer and more easily forthcoming than I had previously expected. In addition, there were a good number of advantages that my position as an insider researcher offered. For example my tacit information and knowledge of acronyms used in the institution allowed the interviews to flow smoothly and without interruption. In addition, I was able to step back during the analysis stage and this helped me locate data that both confirmed and contradicted my own observations.

Having outlined how the data was collected and analysed, the following chapter outlines the results of the quantitative data that was produced by this research. A discussion and analysis of the qualitative data is located in Chapter 6.

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Chapter 5: The Survey Data – a descriptive overview

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the quantitative results from the questionnaire survey. A discussion and exploration of the findings of the qualitative data (from both the questionnaire and the interviews) is presented in Chapter 6, which is 'The Discussion of the Qualitative Data'.

The quantitative survey data is presented, and briefly summarised, via a series of tables using straightforward numbers and percentages. Three additional tables can be viewed in Appendix 10 and these contain survey information which, in the end, was not used to either address the research questions or the theoretical underpinnings of the project. However, they do summarise additional descriptive data concerning the survey participants.

The data was not examined by using statistical tests such as inferential tests, or regression. There were a number of reasons for this: for example, the number of survey respondents is too small for inferential tests, the sample population was not a random sample, there are no equally numbered groups of people for an ANOVA analysis of variance, and tests for regression can only be used when one looks for predictive results. Nevertheless, the descriptive statistics were useful in contextualising and framing the study. Because the questionnaire explored what factors influence module design, the approaches people took in the design process, and how they used module design documents, the resulting data helped to develop the subsequent interview schedule and provide benchmarks for the interview questions. The quantitative data analysis also supported and triangulated what was produced by the thematic mapping of the qualitative data and thus this chapter acts as a pre-cursor to Chapter 6.

As a brief reminder, the overall aim of this thesis was to explore what the reported influences and drivers of module design and redesign were in one UK university, with a particular focus on whether design practice is a collaborative or individual activity, if contemporary design models impact on

the process of module design and at what stage of the design process do academics and module leaders deal with the assessment task in relation to the practice of designing modules. I was interested in what people told me, via their personal experiences, what they did and why they did it that way.

When analysing and interpreting the data, the dataset was viewed across the whole cohort. For example, the data was not presented by groups according to gender or by academic discipline. The reason for this was because I chose not to ask for this data and so the survey questions did not specifically ask for this information because it was not required to answer the research questions.

5.2 The survey data

When the project was originally conceived, it was envisaged that the questionnaire data would be subsequently analysed by job title (such as 'professor' or 'lecturer'. However this information was not included in this thesis as, first, it was not required to address the research questions, and second, an analysis of the data (using cross-tabulations) revealed that there were no substantial findings that could give credence to include it.

Respondents were also asked if they acted as a programme or course leader, and/or as a module leader, but again this information was not used as none of the research questions asked if there is a difference between the two groups in respect of module design.

5.3 Information about the survey respondents

Ninety-six people completed the survey. Table 1 (in Appendix 10) shows that most of the respondents (almost three quarters) were lecturers or senior lecturers. This ratio was similar to the records kept by Human Resources (HR) at that time. Correspondence with HR revealed that information held on 'staff numbers by job family' documented that there were 399 lecturers/senior lecturers on the staff records, as against 90 professorial staff and 97 research staff. In other words, and with respect to the type of questionnaire respondents and staff records, the largest group of staff who would be more

likely to be involved in module design and redesign was lecturers and senior lecturers. Forty-two respondents acted as a programme leader (six people didn't answer the question) and 80 respondents acted as a module leader (four people didn't answer the question). The questionnaire responses also suggested that out of the 42 respondents who stated that they were a programme leader, 39 of these people (from the 80 mentioned above) said that they were a module leader too.

When asked how many modules they were teaching this academic year, the majority of survey respondents (32 or 33.3%) taught 3-4 modules for the 2011-12 academic year with 25 (26.0%) teaching 1-2 modules and 21 (21.9%) respondents teaching 5-6 modules. Eight people (8.3%) taught 7+ modules, but 7 (7.3%) taught none. (Three people didn't answer the question). Most respondents (50 or 52.1%) had been teaching in higher education for 8+ years (see Table 2 in Appendix 10) and 58 respondents (60.5%) possessed teaching or teaching-related qualifications which included some form of training or teaching about curriculum design.

Eighty-three respondents (86.5%) had been involved in module design (see Table 3 in Appendix 10). From these, 21 (21.9%) rated themselves as being very experienced in module design and 37 (38.5%) as being quite experienced.

5.4 Responses to the survey questions

5.4.1 Experiences of designing a module

Nearly all of the respondents (82 out of 83) who had participated in module design had experience of enhancing an existing module where the module descriptor was already in place.

Thirty-seven respondents had designed a new module (i.e. one 'from scratch') in collaboration with other people and 50 people said that they had done this alone (see Table 6 below). Because 19 people said that they did not have experience of designing a new module, and 9 respondents didn't answer this question, the total number of respondents with such experience

was 68. However, respondents could tick more than one box and therefore a number of respondents will have ticked both 'yes' responses, which is why they total 87. However, and by subtracting the 37 collaborating respondents from the 68 respondents, it can be calculated that 31 (45.5%) of the 68 had worked only by themselves when designing a new module.

Table 6: Do you have any experience of designing a new module from scratch? This means that there was no existing module descriptor in place, and that the module had never been taught by anyone else before (n=96). Respondents could tick more than one box.

	Number	***%***
Yes, by myself	50	52.1
Yes, in collaboration with other people	37	38.5
No	19	19.8
Didn't answer the question	9	9.4

5.4.2 Influences upon module design

Table 7 shows the factors that were identified as influencing module design. Twelve respondents didn't answer the question. 'Subject area' was clearly the most preferred answer, with 'subject pedagogy', 'your own experiences of higher education' and 'established team or school practice' being next important, to fairly similar extents. (In this context subject pedagogy refers to the process of engaging with one's subject area or discipline via the learning and teaching literature and theory). This was a multiple answer question whereby respondents could tick more than one box. 'Away days' were the least important factor.

Twenty-two respondents ticked the 'other box' and all of them provided qualitative responses. These are explored and discussed in Chapter 6.

Table 7: Is your practice of module design influenced by: (n=84)

Type of influence	Number	%
Your subject area	75	89.2
Your own experiences of Higher Education	56	66.6
Your subject pedagogy	54	64.3
Established practice within your own School or Team	51	60.7
Professional Courses (e.g. PGCHEP or PGCert)	43	51.2
In-house training seminars and/or workshops	41	48.8
External events, such as conferences or seminars	30	35.7
Other	22	26.2
Awaydays	10	11.9

Respondents used a variety of aids to help them design curricula. Table 8 shows that 'discussions with departmental and school colleagues' was by far the most common tool used in designing curricula, with the 'module descriptor template notes' and 'team meetings' being the next important. 'How-to-do-it 'design books' was the least preferred answer.

Table 8: Think of your most recent experience: when you are designing curricula do you use any of the following aids to help you? Tick up to 3 that are the most important to you: (n=84)

Type of aid used	Number	%
Discussions with departmental or School colleagues	70	83.3
The module descriptor template guidance notes	46	54.8
Team meetings	34	40.5
Models of curriculum design (for example ‘constructive alignment’ or ‘threshold concepts’	27	32.1
Discussions with educational developers or learning technologists	23	27.4
The internet	22	26.2
Other	16	19
Away days	15	17.9
Workshops	11	13.1
Other	16	19
Nothing	0	0
Didn't answer	12	14.2

Sixteen people ticked the 'other' box, and 15 of these elaborated their answers. Six of the responses mentioned the following topics: 'professional body guidance/requirements' (3), 'industry requirements' (2), 'learning theories' (1) and again, these are presented in the next section. It should be noted that had the survey been executed now (2015) at least two additional tick box answers would have referred to the decisions made with students, future employers and other stakeholders as they are now considered to make an important contribution to the design and redesign process.

Twenty-six of the 68 respondents who had experience of designing a new module used a module descriptor by starting at the beginning and working their way through in the order of the template (see Table 9). Nine respondents said that they started at the beginning of the template and worked their way through in no particular order. Fifteen people said that they started at a convenient point for them.

Table 9: Only answer this question if you have experience of writing a new module. Using your most recent experience, whereabouts on the module descriptor template do you start? (n=68)

Position	Number	%
I start at the beginning and work my way through in the order of the template	26	38.2
Other	16	23.5
I start at a convenient point for me	15	22.1
I start at the beginning and work my way through in no particular order	9	13.2

Sixteen respondents ticked the 'other' box. Eight of these latter respondents elaborated what they meant by 'other' and what they wrote could be grouped into the following accounts: 'I start with the learning outcomes but then go to assessment' (2), 'the syllabus' (2), 'professional skills' (1), and 'I don't use the template' (1). The writing of syllabus, professional skills and the assessment are located from between the middle and the end of the template. These responses are revisited these in section 6.3.4.

Although there is no illustrative table, most respondents (75 from 83) involved in module design said that they looked at other module descriptors within the programme to see if there was any duplication of curricula. Four people said that they didn't. The remaining four respondents didn't answer the question.

Respondents were asked if they had ever wanted to change the design of a module but did not go through with it. Thirty-seven people said that they had. When asked what had stopped them from making the change (respondents could tick more than one answer) the most commonly cited reasons were limited resources (21) and 'school/faculty procedures' (11) (see Table 10). 'University regulations' scored eight and 'reaction from programme leader' was ticked by five people. As well as the options noted above, respondents were given an 'other reasons' box. This option was ticked by 11 people and their qualitative responses are discussed in section 6.3.1.

Table 10: What stopped you from making a change to a module design? (n=37)

Reason	Number	%
Limited resources	21	56.8
School or Faculty procedure	11	29.7
Other	11	29.7
University regulations	8	21.6
Limited resources	5	13.5

5.4.3 Thinking about the assessment

When planning assessments, question 11 revealed that the majority of respondents (62) involved in module design (n=82 as 14 of the 96 people did not answer the question) said that this was something that they returned to throughout the process of design. Seventeen respondents said that they thought about assessment at the beginning of the process and only three people said that they planned the assessment at the end. The most important factors that people took into account when they thought about the type of assessment that they would use for their module were class size (63), assessments already in the programme (51), workload (49) and student

feedback (48) (see Table 11). Respondents could tick more than one answer box although people didn't answer the question**.**

Table 11: Using your most recent experiences, which of the following factors do you take into account when you think about the type of assessment that you will use for your module? (n=82)

Factor taken into account	Number	%
Class size	63	75.9
Assessments already used in degree programme	51	61.4
Your workload	49	59.0
Student feedback	48	57.8
Subject benchmarks	46	55.4
Transferable skills	45	54.2
Professional validating bodies	44	53.0
Institutional practice	29	34.9
What an employer would want to see	29	34.9
Conventional practice	26	31.3
Other	21	25.3

Twenty-one people ticked the 'other' box and all of them elaborated on this answer. Eight respondents indicated that they considered the intended learning outcomes and two said that they considered 'the curriculum as a whole', and the qualitative comments from this group of respondents are discussed in the next chapter (6.3.2.1).

5.5 Further analyses of the data

Some questions could be analysed in more detail and section 5.5.1 looks at the differences between the responses of people with a teaching qualification and those without.

However, the data from other questions was not analysed any further than already demonstrated in the tables above. For example, it was not useful to look for any relationships between the respondent's position held at the University (question one) with the data from other questions, as the vast majority of respondents ticked the box labelled 'Lecturer or Senior Lecturer'. In other words, there were insufficient numbers in the other categories. The

data for question 10 was also heavily skewed towards one tick-box response as almost all of the respondents ticked 'yes', as they did check for duplication in modules when designing curricula.

Questions 5, 7, 8, 12 and 13 incorporated multiple choice questions whereby respondents could tick more than one box and therefore it was impossible to cross-tabulate responses to other categories. This might have been problematic had this study been relying on the quantitative data to address the research questions, but as the main function of the survey results was to help to design the interview schedule, this was not considered to be an issue.

5.5.1 Comparing the data between respondents with and without teaching qualifications

When looking at the 58 respondents who possessed teaching or teaching-related qualifications that included some level of teaching or training about curriculum design, 12 of those respondents assessed themselves as being very experienced in module design and 26 said that they were quite experienced. Seventeen respondents with these qualifications said that they were novices (see Table 12).

Of the 27 respondents who didn't possess qualifications, 7 rated themselves as being very experienced in module design, 9 (33.3%) as quite experienced and 8 as a novice.

Table 12: Respondent experience in module design for those with and those without teaching or teaching-related qualifications

Level of experience	With teaching qualification (n=58)	Without teaching qualification (n=27)
Quite experienced	26 (44.8%)	9 (33.3%)
A novice	17 (29.3%)	8 (29.7%)
Very experienced	12 (20.7%)	7 (25.9%)
No answer	3 (5.2%)	3 (11.1%)

What this tells us is that more people with teaching qualifications (than without) consider themselves to be quite experienced in module design, although more respondents without the qualifications rate themselves as being very experienced. This might be because it is generally newer staff who complete the training programme (it is a contractual requirement that new academics attend and pass it), whereas the more established, very long-standing academics (e.g. those who have been employed at the university of focus for more than 15 years, and before the training course was introduced) are not contractually required to enrol onto the course, although they may do so voluntarily. This bears out what has been observed in practice, in that no one is asked if they have a qualification before being asked to design a module (or a programme for that matter), and so the institution doesn't see it as a pre-requisite to being able to do the task.

Whilst there is no illustrative table, most (31) of the 58 respondents who possessed a teaching or teaching-related qualification had eight or more years teaching experience in higher education. The remaining 27 respondents were spread across the 2-7 year period. However, of the 27 respondents who did not possess a qualification, 18 of these also had eight or more years teaching experience, and these were probably academics who had been employed by the university for more than 15 years as the in-house PGCHE course did not exist then.

When looking at the respondents who possess a qualification, Table 13 shows how many of them start at the beginning of the module template when designing a module. It should be remembered that people with a qualification were very possibly exposed to curriculum design models that promote the practice of starting with the learning outcomes and aims and objectives. The point is that the writing of the learning outcomes and aims and objectives form the first two sections on the institutional module template.

Table 13: The starting point on the module template for respondents with or without teaching or teaching-related qualifications

	With teaching qualification (n=58)	**Without qualification** (n=27)
I start at the beginning and work my way through in the order of the template	16 (27.6%)	9 (33.3%)
Didn't answer	14 (24.1%)	7 (25.9%)
Other	12 (20.7%)	3 (11.1%)
I start at a convenient point for me	10 (17.2%)	5 (18.6%)
I start at the beginning and work my way through in no particular order	6 (10.4%)	3 (11.1%)

When respondents were asked 'whereabouts on the module descriptor do you start' when designing a new module, whilst most of the people with a teaching qualification started at the beginning of the template, so did most of the people without a qualification. Thus there is no expectation that the possession of a qualification influences the way in which a respondent uses a template. When comparing the point on the template at which respondents begin the process the percentage scores for both of the groups of respondents with a teaching qualification, and for those without, were very similar for each response

When looking at what influences module design for people with or without a qualification (see Table 14) the most frequently ticked answers for respondents who possess a qualification were 'your subject area', ‘your subject pedagogy’, ‘professional courses’ and 'your own experiences of higher education'. 'Established practice within your own school or team' and ‘in-house training seminars' were the next preferred answers. 'Your subject area', 'your own experiences of higher education' and 'established practice within your own School or Team' were the most frequently ticked responses for those who did not possess a teaching qualification. 'Professional courses' was one of the least preferred responses for this group.

Table 14: What factors influence module design for respondents with or without a teaching qualification?

Type of qualification	With teaching qualification (n=58)	Without teaching qualification (n=27)
Your subject area	47 (81.0%)	24 (88.8%)
Your subject pedagogy	40 (69.0%)	11 (40.7%)
Professional courses e.g. PGCHEP or PGCert	36 (62.1%)	5 (18.5%)
Your own experiences of Higher Education	34 (58.7%)	20 (74.0%)
Established practice within your own school or team	33 (56.9%)	16 (59.3%)
In-house training seminars and/or workshops	27 (46.6%)	11 (40.7%)
External events such as conferences and seminars	19 (32.8%)	8 (29.6%)
Other	13 (22.4%)	6 (22.2%)
Away days	6 (10.3%)	4 (14.8%)
No answer	3 (5.2%)	3 (11.1%)

However, the responses are in quite different proportions, and the data suggests that those who have a teaching qualification are more disposed to draw upon wider influences. It was also interesting that the respondents with the teaching qualification were more likely to be influenced by subject pedagogy. This suggests that it is through engaging with such courses that people encounter and find value in subject pedagogy, or that they go on to make use of it. Similarly, one's own experiences of higher education scored more highly for respondents who did not possess a teaching qualification, which suggests that the qualification might influence the way that some people viewed their experiences. In other words, those without the qualification might have retained their views that were based upon past experiences.

When one looked at the 'aids' that are used when designing curricula (see Table 15) 'discussions with departmental or school colleagues and 'the module descriptor template notes' were the two preferred answers for both groups. This tells us that having a qualification makes little difference to design experiences when working with colleagues or when completing the template. However, exceptions to the similarities were 'models of curriculum design' and 'discussions with educational developers or learning technologists'. More respondents with a teaching qualification used these aids, and this is because of the exposure that they will have had to them. This is an interesting and important finding. Worth noting is that the least preferred answer for both groups was 'how-to-do-it curriculum design books'. As before, respondents could tick more than one answer.

Table 15: Aids that are used to design curricula with or without teaching qualifications

	With teaching qualification (n=58)	**Without qualification (n=27)**
Discussions with departmental or School colleagues	46 (79.3%)	22 (81.5%)
The module descriptor template notes	31 (53.4%)	14 (51.9%)
Models of curriculum design	19 (32.8%)	4 (14.8%)
Team meetings	19 (32.8%)	13 (48.1%)
Discussions with educational developers or learning technologists	15 (25.9%)	4 (14.8%)
The internet	12 (20.7%)	7 (25.9%)
Other	12 (20.7%)	2 (7.4%)
Workshops	10 (17.2%)	0
Away days	8 (13.8)	6 (22.2%)
No answer	3 (5.2%)	4 (14.8%)
'How-to-do-it' curriculum design books	2 (3.4%)	1 (3.7%)
Nothing	0	0

There was also little difference in the responses between these two groups regarding the point at which one plans the assessment, as the majority number in both groups said that it was something that they returned to throughout the process (see Table 16).

Table 16: The point at which the assessment is planned, with or without teaching qualifications

	With a teaching qualification (n=58)	Without teaching qualification (n=27)
It's something that I return to throughout the process	42 (72.4%)	18 (66.7%)
Beginning	9 (15.5%)	6 (22.2%)
No answer	4 (6.9%)	3 (11.1%)
End	3 (5.2%)	0

5.5.2 Perceived experiences of module design

The number of respondents who considered themselves to be very experienced or quite experienced in module design increased with the number of years that people had been teaching (see Table 17). However, the number of respondents who considered that they were a novice did not follow this pattern. This was expected, as it has already been highlighted that not all respondents had experience of designing a module 'from scratch'.

Table 17: Personal perception of experience in module design and the number of years teaching experience (n=96)

Years of teaching	Very experienced	Quite experienced	A novice	No answer
0	0	0	1	0
1-2	0	0	3	1
2-3	0	2	8	1
4-5	0	3	4	0
6-7	2	5	3	3
8+	17	25	7	1
Didn't answer	2	2	3	3
Total	21	37	29	9

However, novices in module design were more likely not to have any experience of designing a new module. Indeed, 15 out of 31 novices said that they had no experience of doing this as against two more experienced respondents.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of novices (24) had experience of enhancing or tweaking an existing module (see Table 18). Thirty-seven 'quite experienced' and 20 'very experienced' respondents also said this. Overall therefore the majority of respondents had experience of tweaking a module in despite of how experienced they perceived themselves to be.

Table 18: Experience of reviewing or adjusting an existing module by level of experience in module design

Level of experience in module design	Very experienced (n=21)	Quite experienced (n=37)	A novice (n=29)
Experience in enhancing a module			
Yes	20 (95.2%)	37 (100%)	24 (82.7%)
No	0	0	4
No answer	1	0	1

On the surface there is no affiliation between the number of modules taught and when someone thinks about the type of assessment that they will use (see Table 19), as the vast majority of respondents within each category (with the exception of people who did not teach any modules) planned the assessment throughout the design process.

Table 19: At what point do you plan the assessment when thinking about planning a new or revising an existing module?

	Number of modules taught					No answer (n=3)
	0 (n=7)	**1-2** (n=25)	**3-4** (n=32)	**5-6** (n=21)	**7+** (n=8)	
Beginning	1	6	5	4	1	0
End	0	0	1	1	1	0
It's something I return to throughout the process	1	15	25	14	6	1
No answer	5	4	1	2	0	2

Although there is no illustrative table, having a teaching or teaching-related qualification didn't dramatically affect the point at which respondents planned the assessment, as 72.4% of those with a qualification and 66.7% of those without one said that their choice of assessment was something that that they returned to throughout the design process. 15.5% and 22.2% respectively said that they started at the beginning.

There was no data to support a relationship between the number of years people had been teaching and the factors that one takes into account when considering the assessment, as the responses were broadly spread across the range of factors for each year of teaching.

5.6 Concluding comments

The survey data was useful as it highlighted a number of areas that merited further exploration. These included the factors that influenced design, the ways in which documents and aids are employed as part of the design process, how and why people approach the assessment in the way that they do, and why having a teaching qualification (or not) might not always make a difference to the way that people might design their modules. This was particularly in respect to the much higher percentage of respondents, with a teaching qualification, who used models of curriculum design in the module design process and who also valued their own subject pedagogy. In addition,

respondents without a teaching qualification were more influenced by their own experience of higher education compared to the other respondents.

Having presented the results of the quantitative survey data, the following chapter explores the outcomes of both sets of qualitative data (from the questionnaire survey and the follow-up interviews) and returns to the research questions in the light of the thematic headings, the existing literature and previous published projects, and also the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of this research.

Chapter 6: The Discussion of the Qualitative Data

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the qualitative data produced from the questionnaire survey and the follow-on interviews. One of the purposes of this chapter is to weave theoretical insights and other published works (as discussed in the literature review) into the discussion so as to address the research questions and to explore the rich data. In addition, new existing literature (which had not been explored when the original literature review was executed) is used to inform the discussion where unanticipated themes are addressed.

The chapter is organised thematically whereby the quantitative survey data, the qualitative survey data and the qualitative interview data are woven into a layered discussion that triangulates the different types of data in relation to existing knowledge and theory and as a means of presenting the new knowledge that this study provides.

Section 6.2 presents the thematic maps and embraces a short outline of the arising master themes (and the clusters that they comprise), the themes that will be explored, why they were chosen, and how they relate to the findings. In section 6.3 an analysis and discussion of the data relating to each theme presents the module design and redesign experiences of the academic staff employed in one UK university who participated in the project. It will be seen that people described what they did, what they didn't or couldn't do, how they executed the process of design and redesign, and why they did it that way.

When reflecting on the themes in terms of the aims of the project, each master theme was considered to be of equal value. This was because in every interview, the responses elicited wide-ranging data that led to the development of the master themes. None of the resulting themes could be dismissed, but three of them (the impact of students, constraints and teaching guidance) were more talked about by the interviewees so they

produced large quantities of data. However, all of the master themes were relevant and this is why they were considered to be of equal value. The working table of themes and the final theming maps are presented in the next section.

6.2 The thematic maps

The themed results of the qualitative data generated by the survey (nearly all of the questionnaire respondents wrote additional comments where space permitted) and the semi-structured interviews are presented as two thematic maps. These show the master themes and sub-themes which have been elicited from the data and which relate to the main research question and the sub-research questions outlined in Chapter 3.

With respect to the qualitative interviews, during each conversation each interviewee talked about their role within the university and their background. However, when analysing the interview data I found no differences in the responses between the genders or between disciplines and that is why a theme referring to gender has not been employed.

There were some slight differences in the responses between participants who said that they were attached to professionally validated and vocational degree programmes and people who were not. However, these were not unexpected. Unlike the interviewees from non-vocational programmes, these respondents said that they consulted the relevant professional bodies when designing their modules. These experiences and this qualitative difference have been included in the analysis and discussion of the data.

Both the qualitative survey and interview data was analysed using a version of interpretive thematic analysis (see Chapter 4). This helped to make sense of the personal (or lived) experiences of module design and redesign. The process used to theme the qualitative data has already been explained in Chapter 4.

Whilst the questionnaire survey mainly consisted of a set of questions which were answered by closed responses, some of the lists of optional answers

also included an 'other' box (this was to be used if the fixed options weren't appropriate). There was also space for respondents to expand upon their answers. Some respondents did just this, but others used the space to write qualitative comments which elaborated on the box(es) that they had ticked. This produced a large amount of qualitative data which had not been previously anticipated. The responses were grouped into the master themes and sub-themes set out in Figure 6.

Figure 6: The master-themes and sub-themes for the qualitative questionnaire data

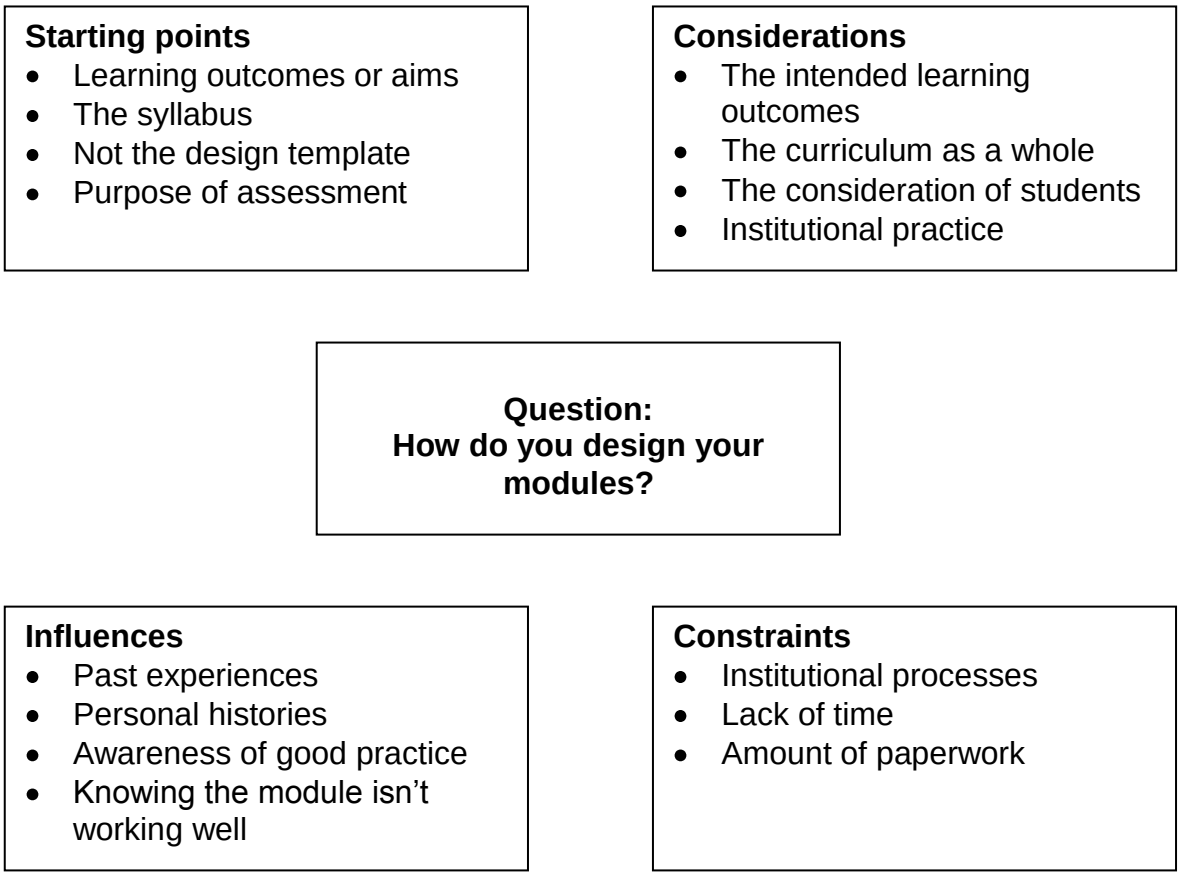


Figure 7, and a further visual thematic map, presents the themes and sub-themes that emerged during the analysis of the qualitative interview data. They are based on the experiences of academic staff of module design, review and redesign. Because the largest part of the data collection and analysis resulted from qualitative interviews the master themes and sub-themes from this data set has been used to structure the discussion of the data as a whole, and this is located in section 6.3.

However, the master themes and sub-themes set out in Figure 6 are incorporated into the structure of the discussion. All of the themes were a driver (which is defined in this context as a causal agent) in that they either influenced how a module was designed or redesigned (or not as was sometimes the case) or that they indirectly influenced design.

All of the master themes were used when discussing the data and the process of arriving at these themes was explained in Chapter 4. Some of them related to specific research questions. For example, and for the main research question:

> ***What influences and drives academics when they are designing and redesigning modules?***

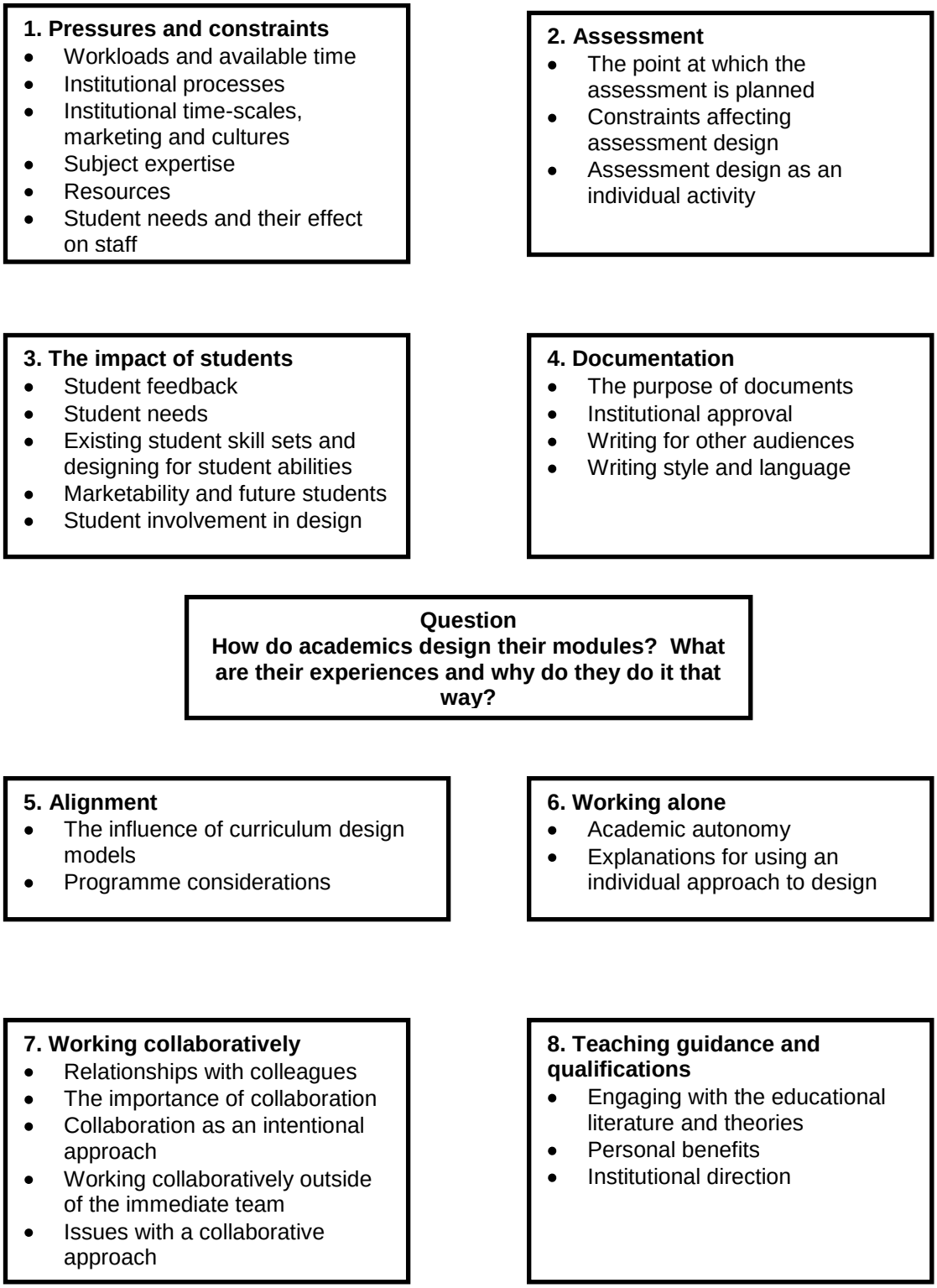
All of the eight master themes (pressures and constraints, assessment, the impact of students, documentation, alignment, working alone, working collaboratively and teaching guidance and qualifications) helped to address this question.

For the first sub-research question:

> ***Is the experience of module design and redesign an individual practice or is it more of a collaborative one?***

The master themes concerning working alone, working collaboratively, documentation, alignment, assessment, and teaching guidance and qualifications were used to explore this sub-question.

Figure 7: The Master themes and sub-themes for the interview data



For the second sub-research question:

> ***What is the relationship between contemporary design models and module design and how much impact do they have on the process?***

Four master themes (documentation, alignment, assessment, teaching guidance and qualifications) were used.

Lastly, and for the sub-research question:

> ***At what stage of the design process do academics and module leaders consider the assessment task for their modules (compared to the teachings of educational developers and theorists) and what factors influence this?***

This was addressed by the following master themes: pressures and constraints, documentation, alignment and assessment.

6.3 The discussion

This chapter is organised by master themes and each one is taken in turn. As mentioned previously, the eight master themes are: 'pressures and constraints', 'assessment', 'the impact of students on the practice of module design', 'documentation', 'alignment', working alone', 'working collaboratively' and 'teaching guidance and qualifications'.

In this project, all of the master themes could be perceived as drivers that have a positive or negative impact on module design and redesign, and each of the master themes and sub-themes within them (as presented as maps in the previous section) will now be discussed and analysed.

The experiences of module design and redesign, as expressed by the survey respondents and follow-up interviewees, were often based upon or steered by personal or institutional pressures. These experiences form the content of the first theme:

6.3.1 Master Theme 1: pressures and constraints

Within this master theme, seven sub-themes were identified. These are: 'workloads and available time', 'institutional processes', 'institutional time-scales, marketing and cultures', 'subject expertise', 'resources', 'student needs and their effect on staff' and 'class size'. Previous studies had already identified constraints as being a driver in design practice, even if this means that they deter or drive people away from doing something, rather than act in a positive way. When interviewees were asked ***'What do you see as the pressures or constraints that influence or affect the way that you design or redesign a module?'*** some of them asked what was meant by a constraint. The response was that constraints were what they felt they were, in respect to their own experience of module design practice.

In this study, the questionnaire survey respondents were not specifically asked about their workloads or what they might think were constraints upon module design or redesign. However, survey respondents did use the questionnaire to express their views on this subject. For example, Chapter 5 has already revealed that one finding was that in a number of instances, module redesign was not taking place in practice, even when respondents *wanted* to review and subsequently redesign a module. Whilst we do not know the worth of any proposed ideas, expressed constraints on design (particularly when wanting to redesign an existing module) included institutional practice, problems related to process such as the amount of paperwork required, and a lack of time. For example, the survey included a question that asked if respondents had *'ever wanted to change the design of a module, but did not go through with it'*. Thirty-seven people said that they had. Chapter 5 also disclosed that when respondents were asked what stopped them from making the change, the most commonly cited reasons were limited resources, 'school/faculty procedures', 'university regulations' and 'reaction from course or programme leader'. Respondents were also given an 'other reasons' box. The resulting 11 responses could be clearly divided into two camps. The first was 'institutional processes' such as the *“amount of paperwork required”, “the hassle”,* and *“change is a slow and*

cumbersome process". The second was 'lack of time' or 'no time'. Five respondents wrote just these words, but one individual said *"workload – I have 13 modules now and can't update them all every year".* In addition, two respondents wrote that their reasons for not changing the design of a module were *"lost interest"* and *"need for application for professional body approval for changes* (to) *degree"*.

On the other hand, a few interviewees mentioned that in their professional areas (these participants were involved in vocational programmes) changing government and professional body policies were a positive driver of design and redesign. One person explained that: *"... a big tweak this year ... was the government's direction of travel ..."* (T10,1,15).

Thus the boundaries and guidelines put into place by certain professional bodies were seen to be a welcome driver of design as they helped to shape module content.

Indeed the realisation that a module needed to change (for whatever reason) was seen as a positive driver rather than a chore or a constraint. One example of this was that the need to change the module because of issues around quality. For example, one interviewee said:

"... And then it's a case of getting out the old module descriptor, blowing the dust off it. And working out what needs to change – editing what is there – discussing with colleagues about whether it's a significant change or not. Does anything really need to change and thinking pragmatically about the process, how it can be best achieved ..." (T17,1,6)

Participants were conscious of maintaining quality modules, and wanted to do so, although it will be seen in the following section that they didn't always have the time to meet the standards that they wanted to achieve. The first of the emergent sub-themes for this master theme follows.

6.3.1.1 Workloads and available time

When considering factors such as workload, available time and institutional practice, questionnaire respondents gave very similar and cohesive responses which could attach them to a particular community of practice (Wenger 1998 cited in Rogan 2011) or an institutional culture.

In the qualitative interviews staff were asked the following question:

> ***"What do you see as the pressures that influence or affect the way that you design a module?"***

Many of the questionnaire respondents (like the interviewees) cited the lack of time and their workload as a constraint or pressure.

One of the findings of this study, which has not appeared in the other curriculum design studies that have been cited, was that interviewees expressed experiences of regret and shame at not having the time to be able to do what one would like to do, the not being happy with one's work, and that quality issues had not been met.

Ramsden (1998, cited in Winter 2009, p.123) asserts that academic identity is posited on the value of discipline scholarship, intellectual curiosity, a community of practice, and professional autonomy. Central to this *"is the notion of academic professionalism ... skills and values to self-regulate their job performance"*, (O'Neill and Meek, 1994 cited in Winter 2009, p.123). Indeed, the interview responses supported Kinman's questionnaire survey of 2,000 academic and academic-related staff (1998, appendix 1), in that 29.6% of the 773 respondents 'strongly agreed' and 44.3% 'agreed' to the statement *"Lack of time forces me to compromise the quality of my work".* This study is almost 20 years old and it is interesting that the findings were similar to some of those presented in this study. Similarly, 14.7% of Kinman's 775 respondents 'strongly agreed' and 44.4% 'agreed' with the statement *"I don't have time to plan and organise my work properly"*. Equally, the study of new lecturers, by Norton et al. (2013) found that the greatest obstruction to innovative design was time, due to workloads and expectations (by others) of

the role. In the research for this thesis two interviewees said:

"Yeah, I did the XX module mmm … it was all done very, very quickly last year because the tutor that was supposed to do it went off sick and so it was given to me and I had about two weeks to sort it out. So last year I wasn't overly happy with it ..." (T1,1,11).

"I guess what I'm ashamed of is that I design the assessment around my workload and what I can cope with, rather than what could be best for the module and I admit to that. I think that there are better things like an assessment process that we can follow that I just don't have the capacity to do. I don't have the capacity at the moment and I don't have the skills". (T3,5,159)

A number of important words appear in the above extracts, which include 'ashamed', 'cope' and 'capacity'. These interviewees suggested that they knew that what they were doing fell below their own expectations of what they should be practising. However, just because they expressed that they feel shame and regret does not mean that it was regretful or shameful. This was because as the issue centred on things that they would like to do, or were necessary to do, but in reality they couldn't do, it was an individual and personal mark of what they perceived to be quality work, although how they benchmarked their own quality is not known.

One interviewee spoke about the coping strategy that s/he had adopted, and centred on flexibility:

"You might not think or have time to think too carefully about a mixture – erm so I would say you tend to be as – leave it as flexibly for you as possible – you don't want to put yourself into a straight-jacket with a module descriptor in case you know there's things you've not considered in that short space of time". (T15,2,45)

The issue of writing module documents loosely to cover all eventualities is something that is revisited in the next theme.

Interviewees were asked if their experience of module design was different if they worked within a very limited time frame. It became clear that one of the key personal issues is reflection. This response was typical:

"… I've had to sort of put together everything that I was going to present from scratch and do that very rapidly – yeah. Over a couple of days – yeah so I've done that before ... you can't work in such a considered way, you haven't got time to reflect on what you're putting together is as robust and as rigorous as you'd like – it's hard to get a good alignment between what you're teaching and what the learning outcomes are ...Yeah, it's different in that sense, because you haven't got the luxury of all the time to er – I find it more helpful when I have got time to let things lie a bit and come back to it with a fresh pair of eyes and I can't do that if I'm under a tight deadline, so I'm sure that affects the quality of work produced as a result." (T19,2,38)

One issue around why experiences concerning quality issues might occur emerged in one of the interviews. This interviewee spoke about how in his/her experience, module design was not seen (by other people) to be important, or as important as other things, which meant that there was less time being allocated to the task:

"I actually don't think we ever really get enough time to design a module … Which isn't helped by the fact that people don't really see it as important ***...*** *that there's very little time or incentive to sit down and reflect on modules and come back to it ... so my teaching load this year is ridiculous – I'm doing 14 hours per week, and with 14 hours a week there's simply no time to reflect after every day, or after every couple of sessions on how it's going ... so I think that's a big one, but also I think the pressures that all ends of the academic year are increasing, so even if you don't have time to reflect as you go through the semester ..."* (T13,4,125)

This interviewee mentioned the concept of reflection three times. That s/he felt unable to do it adequately was put down to the lack of available time, and s/he went on to discuss the consequences of not being able to do this. His/her experience is presented in section 6.4.3. Fitzmaurice (2013, p.619)

suggests that *"a capacity for reflection and understanding enable one to work towards integrity"* but integrity was a word that was not raised in this study. Indeed, and despite the above comments, another interviewee said that having a limited amount of time had a positive effect on their module design. This person was using module design as an opportunity to manage their workload:

"I don't always think about these time pressures in a negative way because it does lead you to think a bit more creatively ... about how to do things because then you have to think about a bigger range of assessments … 2-3 hour lectures are not on anyway, so how do you give them an experience of other forms of working that will give them a meaningful experience that is also a time friendly thing for you as well". (T4,3,76)

Nevertheless, not only did interviewees state that a lack of time dampened their enthusiasm to design or redesign a module, but also that coping strategies such as working beyond one's contractual hours were employed just to cope with their existing workload. For example, one interviewee said:

".... I've got to sit and mark 180 assignments and given that we have to give feedback within four weeks erm I've designed it so they're handing it in tomorrow because that gives me that extra one week over Christmas which I will have to do some marking in, because you know, I am on annual leave, but I've got to do it, so it's just giving myself an appropriate time really to do it". (T22,4,108)

These responses reflected previous studies concerning drivers of curricula. In their baseline review of curriculum design, the University of Birmingham T-Sparc project noted that when attempting to collaboratively design curricula, *"Staff are under a lot of pressure with their workloads as it is, which makes it exceedingly difficult to get everybody together to spend sufficient time thinking things through"* (T-Sparc Blog 2012b – 'time and space for design'). In addition, one interviewee (a course co-ordinator) from the Goos and Hughes (2010) study said, *"I don't want assessment support. What I want is*

adequate time to do my job, without excessive and ridiculous bureaucratic demands from central administration" (2010 p.321).

There have been a number of studies on the subject of workloads since 1945 (see Tight (2010) for an overview of these). A lot of what has been revealed in this study emerged in other studies 15-20 years ago. However, this does not mean that this study is a replication of what has come before it, rather it is considered to triangulate the findings of previous studies. What came across from the interviews in this study (and from nearly half of the questionnaire respondents too) was that there was an increase in administrative work, rather than what is believed to be traditional academic work. One interviewee said:

"... there's almost no time for reflection at the end of the semester, because you sort of stop, sleep for a couple of days, then the marking comes, and then you're straight back into teaching and pretty much the same happens in May, and then you do all the marking – there's all the assessment boards – somewhere in that period you'll have to do forms ... so I think those are really big issues". (T13,4,125)

By forms, this person was referring to the end of semester and academic year paperwork which reflect on module and programme delivery, student feedback, attainment levels and whether or not institutional criteria have been met.

The issue of having to do increased administrative work is something that was explored by Tight (ibid. p.211). He found that *"the quantitative evidence seems to suggest that much of the pressure on academic workloads has come not from demands to do more teaching or more research as such but from the increasing impact of administration"*. He concluded that *"this appears, in general, as the least liked of the three key academic roles of research, teaching and administration … paradoxically, the increasing amount of time spent on it threatens the quality of the teaching and the research it is meant to protect"* (ibid. p.214). One of Tight's final concluding comments emphasizes that this undesired increase in workload constrains

personal research, and that it is the latter role that is generally liked by academics the most. This phenomenon was also commented on by Roberts (2015) in *that "Research was seen as more highly valued and rewarded than teaching … Many participants regarded integrating their disciplinary research in curricula as a way to capitalize on the synergies between research and teaching …"* (Roberts, 2015, p.552).

6.3.1.2 Institutional processes

Apart from the issues of time, one of the most cited constraints in this study was the institutional module approval process. One suggestion made by a participant of the University of Birmingham's T-Sparc project was that *"historically what has happened in design has been principally governed by deadlines, compliance with process and the set piece occasion is the Approval panel"* (2012b, Blog - Audience).

One important finding was that the concept of institutional processes being self-defeating. There is evidence within the data that institutional processes are negatively affecting module design and redesign. Rather than encouraging innovative practice, in some circumstances they create an attitude that thinks that working with the status quo, rather than making any modular changes, is easier or less bothersome.

As highlighted previously, survey respondents were asked if they had ever wanted to change the design of a module but did not go through with it. Thirty-seven people (around 40%) said that they had. This data suggested that changing the design of a module was not always happening, even when respondents *wanted* to change it. Whilst we do not know the worth of any proposed ideas, people's expressed constraints on design (particularly when wanting to change an existing module) included institutional practice, problems related to process such as the amount of paperwork required, and a lack of time. Chapter 5 revealed that when respondents were asked what stopped them from making the change, two of the most commonly cited reasons were 'school/faculty procedures' and 'university regulations'. Eleven

of these respondents elaborated with qualitative responses, which included comments such as the *"amount of paperwork required", "the hassle",* and *"change is a slow and cumbersome process".*

In the institution researched in this study, the required documents for *programme* approval are read and commented on by an internal validating body. However these documents include the module descriptor templates which are used to demonstrate the purpose and design of an individual module. Almost all of the interviewees mentioned this body during their interview as it features in the everyday module design process, but some interviewees specifically mentioned the internal validating body when they were asked to talk about what they conveyed as a constraint on module design. The following extract was typical:

"… there's a lack of consistency – if you're putting together a new module there always seems to be inconsistency about what you're expected to do, what's necessary to get the module approved and what's not needed. So going through the whole designing a new module and putting it through XX (internal validating body) *was a bit of a nightmare really ... one of the pressures was a lack of consistent information about what was needed, which put me under pressure as a result ..."* (T19,2,67).

The findings from this study were contrary to the T-Sparc 'Blog on 'Baseline Review' (2012b) in which the validation processes were seen to have a positive impact on design, as not one interviewee spoke favourably about the validation process, despite acknowledging that it is a necessary one. Rather, they supported the study by Norton et al. (2010) in which one of their interviewees said that the module proposal documents *"... are set in stone … I think that hurdles of going to various panels to have your module changed puts people off … I get the impression from talking to colleagues that the process is long-winded and bureaucratic"* (p.354).

The work of Kinman (1998, s.9.5) also reported that *"74 per cent of respondents believe that there is too much emphasis on quality assurance in*

their institutions ... Several academics also mentioned that meeting these requirements was a significant source of pressure and resentment in their working lives ...".

Two people in this study remarked that:

"Well for me it's all too slow, because I would like a more fluid and dynamic approach to setting up modules ... and when you start teaching – things change and that's something XX (internal validating body) *doesn't allow for … it's a committee structure – they need agendas, they need planning in advance. But sometimes, certainly here, I find it a bit cumbersome and when you get module changes to them, and a module descriptor sometimes, perhaps nine months before a module needs to be taught ..."* (T4,4,133)

"I would in all honesty not change a module or a programme structure unless it was absolutely necessary ... to go through the process of changes ... having to do all the documentation so far in advance of when it would actually impact on the students erm and to go through the process of the XX (internal validating body) *which you know, let's face it, depending on who's on the XX* (internal validating body) *is an extremely intimidating process, now I don't find that useful, don't find that a useful mechanism for looking at either module or course documentation".* (T23,2,50)

The above two comments were concerned with the advance planning required for review and redesign. One other interviewee commented on the conformity required by the approval process, and how this impacted upon his/her assessment design:

"… I went to a conference on distance learning and there was a course which was written and had gone through quality assurance at some other university … they tailored the assessment to that student … I would love to be able to do that but I'm not sure that our XX (internal validating body) *would take it (laugh)."* (T12,4,114)

This was an interesting use of words in that the interviewee didn't know that the validating body wouldn't 'take it', but that the interviewee didn't want to risk it.

6.3.1.3 Institutional time-scales, marketing and cultures

This study revealed that there are other 'institutional' processes which can impact on module design and redesign. One interviewee suggested that marketing of programmes was at the forefront of his/her mind. S/he commented on:

" … the freshness of that module. You know how current is it, how up to date is it – how leading edge etc and you know, that's research isn't it, that's seek and retrieve er so that might be pressures on you, how much, how much are you kind of stepping out into the unknown maybe around some of that – er – and that unknown could create problems at the validation or problems with the process of delivering it etc – do you know what I mean by that? (Interviewer answers 'yes') Erm – so I think that's another pressure – how brave and bold do you want to be or how much do you want to, to tread assured ground?" (T20,3,105)

This interviewee elaborated further by explaining that module design didn't always mean that one could design a module that would be exciting for the designer:

"... okay it's not necessarily about having sweeties in the shop window cos sometimes people need cod-liver oil …" (T20,7,222)

Another interviewee spoke about how the institutional time-scales employed to make curricula changes impacted negatively on redesign following his/her module reviews. S/he remarked that:

"Well the main one that drives me crazy is the time-scales because we're expected to review module descriptors in May before we even teach modules and if it's semester two modules or link modules and that to me seems ridiculous. It drives me mad. You can't review a module properly before you

finish teaching it but we're expected to and we're expected to submit module changes before you've even finished teaching it and I don't think that's the right way to do it. (Laughing) I'm probably not the only person that thinks that but … (laughing) ... it's just not logical to do that – even if I didn't have the PGCHE (a teaching qualification) I would still think that. It is illogical to review a module before you've got the feedback or done the assessment or got the results – it's crazy." (T2,2,56)

The point being made by this interviewee was raised by Beetham (2009, section C) in that *"Staff want processes to be better timed and integrated: 'minor modification had to be submitted before feedback from students on this year's course had been received"* (Beetham 2009, section C).

In contrast however, one interviewee thought that institutional time-scales (or deadlines) were a positive driver of design, and ensured that reviews (and any subsequent redesign) occurred in a timely manner:

"I think the fact that there are deadlines are quite useful because it – if we remember that there are deadlines and we use them as a prompt as a trigger to say okay it doesn't need changing. Without them, then two things: A. you just get organic drifting in the sense that you change every time something changes or B. the descriptors never get changed at all …" (T17,3,94).

With respect to institutional 'top-down' culture, one interviewee expressed that the knowledge and teaching skills required to articulate module design are not valued institutionally, and that the research culture was more important. S/he said:

"When I did my PGCHE I think it was made very clear to me that teaching excellence and curriculum design and all those elements are very much valued ... and I think it is something that as an institution we might be moving away from. And then because there's a change in the sector and certainly the REF has just become the be all and end all Holy Grail for academics now." (T16,8,249)

This conveyed experience of the focus on the importance of active research affected the attitude of this interviewee, which in turn shaped their perceived identity and worth as a practitioner. This was something that was echoed in the study by Norton et al. (2013) who found that privileging research over teaching excellence was a common practice in universities.

6.3.1.4 Subject expertise

About a third of the interviewees said that one of the pressures on module design was having to take on modules which were not associated with their research or knowledge base. Indeed the expressed pressure of a lack of 'subject knowledge' was described by a number of interviewees as being something that concerned them, and it was something that they considered in the design process. Thus two interviewees within this project remarked that:

"We deliberately design modules in such a way that there is a number of academic staff involved in it ... staff function a lot better when we have more than one member of staff with adequate expertise in more than one area because what we don't want and we have suffered this before is when … a critical member of staff is all of a sudden not there any longer and it leaves an enormous hole, and it's too late to start planning for it …" (T6,4,105).

To help with this issue, one interviewee suggested that the research interests of new academics should be embraced into the curriculum because:

"... when young academics come in, and take over modules, that ... have been taught by academics that have left or retired – I think that's really bad practice, because they are coming into take over a curriculum that's not theirs" (T4,5,150)

This extract came from an interviewee who was referring to examples where personal subject areas and research expertise were not always being utilised. This view coincides with the findings of Norton et. al. where they found that *"the conflicting roles of research and teaching were also a major issue facing those new professionals"* (2010 p.345).

In some instances, interviewees stated that there were only one or two persons with a particular specialised knowledge, who could leave the university at any time, and thus modules were written with this in mind. This implied that there is a tension between offering robust, resilient and durable modules which are also responsive to staff expertise. About a third of the interviewees confirmed what one of the above interviewees said, in that one of the pressures on module design was having to take on modules which were not associated with their research or knowledge. Two interviewees commented that:

"The other major constraint is my existing skill set in terms of XX (subject area) because I have very little time to develop in that area because I have so many other things going on ..." (T6,4,128).

"It wasn't my (knowledge) *area in XX (subject), yet nevertheless I was asked to write descriptors for them – erm and I did that, because I was asked, on the proviso that if the course was to run I wouldn't be expected to be the one that teaches the module ... I'm glad the programme doesn't run because actually I wouldn't have any faith in not being the person that has to teach it … I personally find it very difficult to think about ways of engaging good students or ways of engaging the different forms of assessment if I don't know the subject area ..."* (T23,3,69).

Although three interviewees did talk about how they were able to design modules around their knowledge or research area, for the majority of interviewees, the fact that their research and modules had little in common was conveyed as a constraint.

One interviewee spoke about his/her comparative experiences of designing a module that was associated with his/her research compared to one that was not research related:

"Well the first semester I was taking over the XX module … so I do all of that module because it is related to my research interests. So I find it more enjoyable doing it, in terms of changing and updating it ... I've been able to

put in examples, put in new stories that are relevant – I think it's really important, especially with XX (subject) to give concrete, tangible, actual examples we can begin talking about … I had existing connections, so we've had a lot of guest speakers coming in which have made things more enjoyable – which again I struggled to do in my other module … I tried very hard to make it good, because I didn't want the students to feel they'd really been short changed ..." (T9,2,42).

This interviewee was articulating what s/he likes to do, rather than what they can do. S/he was talking about the adjustment to the reality of their professional duties versus their expectations of being a new academic.

The accounts of how subject knowledge (of both the interviewees and of their colleagues) impacted on design in the university of focus for this study conflicted with the study by Mathieson whereby *"there was a tendency to build the curriculum around the research strengths of academics, with disciplinary specialisations favoured over curriculum coherence"* (2012, p.554). In this study, and in line with the views of Becher and Trowler (2001) there was evidence of building a curriculum around a sparsely populated knowledge base.

6.3.1.5 Resources

In his study of academic staff, Anderson (2011 p.722) noted that *"the changing times and student context means that staff are under pressure to be more innovative and scholarly … Finally the design of the curriculum needs to be considered in the light of available and perhaps changing financial, material and human resources".*

In this study, people's experience of being innovative manifested itself as a necessary approach to design and redesign. For example, and to avoid future resource issues, module descriptors were written very loosely (avoiding a 'straight-jacket' as one interviewee suggested) and flexibly, and a number of people said that they regretted the lack of time to be able to reflect on their work because this meant that things didn't get changed. Such

experiences were similarly documented in the study by Coria et al. (2010). However, in that study, a perceived negative impact on resources produced resistance to curricula enhancement.

'Staffing implications' and 'timetabling' were interpreted in the data analysis as being located under the wider umbrella of 'resources'. The following statements from two of the interviewees in this project, and concerning limited resources and their effect on design and redesign, embraced much of what other interviewees were saying:

"So I think pressures are around resource, academic staff, the nature of those academic staff, how much external resources you might need to bring into that in terms of people etc ... In the end it comes down to money one way or another". (T20,3,94)

"... my primary determinant - what will determine module tweaking is resources. What do I need to run this module at its most efficient, and I find that a bit of a tragedy really. That is it – that's what determines it now. If I choose to do this innovative assessment how much extra work will that take me and if it would take a lot of extra work I wouldn't do it." (T23,1,31)

There was a tension between what staff felt they wanted to do and what they felt they could do. In the study by Hemera (2014) staff made attempts to find a compromise between assessments that add value to the learning experience, and the time they spent designing it, explaining it and marking it.

One interviewee spoke about his/her observations of other colleagues who refrain from enhancing the programme curricula (which is a part of their work duties) because there are limited resources:

"... most of it is driven by resource, not by any great educational desire or aim to do the best for us and to do the best for students ... I mean I personally don't have a desire to write a new module at the minute, but I can think of team members who given an opportunity would want to write some elective modules ... to my mind they are being held back from writing new modules and that is resource driven and seems a shame." (T23,4,130)

This statement is supported by Kinman's (1998, appendix 1) survey, which revealed that 58.7% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'my performance at work is compromised by a lack of resources'.

Kinman (1998) suggested that many interviewees cited the accessibility (or not) of resources as being a main consideration in the process of designing modules and this is similar to the suggestions made by Fearon (2008), Cross et al. (2008), Beetham (2009) and the University of Ulster 'Viewpoints' (2012) project.

6.3.1.6 Student needs and their effect on staff

Student needs were at the forefront of almost all of the interviewees' minds when they talked about 'pressures'. This affected the overall design of the module by embracing assessment, subject content, 'levels' and teaching strategies. For example a number of interviewees suggested that they felt that a pressure upon module design was having to accommodate the needs of 'students who shouldn't be here'. Indeed, accommodating the needs of students entering higher education compared to perhaps those who were a student say 15 years ago was, in this study, a very obvious driver of design in that it was commonly implied by the interviewees that *"bright and able"* students made their work much easier.

In Mathieson's study of socially situated practices adopted by 30 academics employed within a South African university, one academic *"spoke of the threat posed to academic standards by the quality of large numbers of educationally disadvantaged students gaining access to university"* (2012, p.554). In this study one interviewee said:

"... the students struggle and you expect them to struggle because they're not technically motivated if you like or not in that kind of arena, and that becomes quite difficult because you start to think well, I've got an issue here of students who may not pass if they have to be on the module, but I don't want to dilute what I'm doing for the students that would really benefit from this

kind of module. So … yeah that's difficult, that's another constraint we found with certain modules". (T15,2,62)

The above quote could be re-framed in that staff feel unable to offer adequate support to students given the resources that they have. If that is the case, then this was an additional example of staff being asked to do more with fewer resources.

All of these interviewees were referring to the changing profile of students and how they had to adapt their curricula to accommodate this. None of the interviewees were actually complaining, or making unfavourable comments about these students. Rather, the comments were made in a context of acceptance, in that it was just something that academics were expected, and were also expecting, to have to do.

In this study, two interviewees spoke about their experiences of having to increase the pass rate and how they didn't feel comfortable with this. However, and in contrast to the studies above, these interviewees suggested that the pressure to pass students came from 'above' (institutionally) rather from the students themselves. One of the interviewees in this study also mentioned the issue of maintaining student pass rates:

"Yeah, well (laugh) the whole kind of pass/fail thing that politically it would be very incorrect to fail any of the students; it's kind of made quite clear to me that erm if students fail, it's not so much of a reflection on the students but a reflection on delivery and content and that sort of thing ... so it's that kind of pressure ..." (T1,3,77).

This interviewee talked further about the pressure that this approach (which concerned the assessment practices operating within a professionally validated degree) had on him/her:

***" …** I don't like it at all and the reason why I don't like it is because - if we don't stretch them - how do we know (pause) and to teach people to write academically - to be able to critically analyse what they are reading and what they are actually writing and how their attitude and how they affect - you*

know - their clientele. This whole kind of circle of stuff that goes on and I think that's wrong because then you end up with the wrong people doing the wrong job. You know - why, why do we do that – it's wrong, that is wrong, and I don't like setting people up to fail either – I don't want people to fail – I don't want to set the margin too high so that they do fail, but I don't want to feel like - erm - I'm not actually testing their abilities. Yeah - that's quite difficult". (T1,3,88)

6.3.1.7 Class size

Five interviewees spoke about how the class size (which they considered to be large) had adversely affected their availability of time, assessment design and marking time. These comments related to the workload of the interviewees. Whilst the issue of class size impacted negatively on module design, it was most evident when interviewees were discussing the assessment. Thus this topic is discussed at length in the next master theme ('Assessment'). It will be seen that two common experiences employed to address this issue were to either strategically design the assessment around the class size, or to not have the time to spend on marking the assessments properly (as experienced by the interviewee). When listening to the interviews, the latter issue can be described as almost 'confessional' in nature.

Overall, this master theme impacted greatly on the findings of this study. All of the questionnaire respondents and follow-up interviewees had something to say about what they thought were constraints upon design. Many of the examples were not just about feeling time-starved, they were also indicative of people feeling guilty and uncomfortable. Six interviewees said that their experiences of module design forced them to take manipulative action, either by deliberately setting assessment deadlines to coincide with their annual leave (so that they could mark assessments whilst not having to go into work) or that they were having to cut corners. Thus designing and enhancing modules to take into account student needs is something that is further discussed in section 6.3.3.3 as the cognitive dissonance between the

obligation to students and the resulting negative impact on staff time was something that emerged during the analysis of the data.

In some respects, the theme of constraints encroached into some of the other themes. This was particularly notable in the two master themes embracing the 'Assessment' and 'The impact of students on the practice of module design'. As such, these two master themes, and their emerging sub-themes, will be explored next.

6.3.2 Master Theme 2: Assessment

One of the things that this project was interested in was the point at which the assessment is planned when designing a module and this master theme produced three sub-themes. The first was pertinent to the second and third research sub-questions in that it embraced data concerning 'the point at which the assessment is planned'. The remaining two emerging sub-themes: 'constraints affecting assessment design' and 'assessment design as an individual activity' addressed the main and other sub-research question.

The questionnaire data had suggested that respondents were not always working in the linear format put forward by some educationalists, and that traditional alignment of the components of a module (e.g. starting with the learning outcomes) had broken down, particularly when considering the mode of assessment. For example, and when answering the survey question *'Using your most recent experience, whereabouts on the module descriptor template do you start?',* the following qualitative comment was written:

"*I start by designing the assessment in order to meet the learning outcomes. Then I write the module in order for students to be able to complete the assessment successfully (provided they mutually engage with the material!)"*

The first of the sub-themes is discussed next.

6.3.2.1 The point at which the assessment is planned

When they were asked at what point they planned the assessment, the majority of questionnaire respondents (62) involved in module design said

that this was something that they returned to throughout the process of design. However, 17 respondents said that they considered the assessment at the beginning of the process and only three people said that they planned the assessment at the end.

Most interviewees also said that they considered the assessment first when enhancing or designing modules and that this practice was the result of some very specific reasons. Sometimes it was because of the constraints that have been mentioned previously. In other instances it was the product of the institutional approval process and student pass rates.

One of the most widely discussed approaches to design (constructive alignment) promotes the ethos that the intended learning outcomes are central to the process, and that these are assessed to see if the actual outcomes are the same as those intended. Biggs and Tang (2011), Toohey (1999) and Moon (2002) also place assessment towards the end of their design models. In relation to this theme, interviewees were asked the following question:

'At what point in the design process do you plan the assessment?'

In this project, about two-thirds (16) of the interviewees said that they considered the assessment design at the beginning of the design process (but sometimes in conjunction with the learning outcomes) rather than at the end. When talking about their experiences of this project, interviewees said:

"Erm I think you have to think about it right at the beginning I think assessment cannot be something that is stuck on the end." (T21,3,85)

"... I think about assessment first and foremost. Because if that's what you're trying to evidence, how are we going to evidence it." (T20,2,49)

"When it came to actually writing the assessment ... it started with the module descriptor which then started with the assessment and made sure that all the learning outcomes were working with the assessment – and was very much a

small iterative process of checking those things against each other ..." (T16,2,63)

The last account was more akin to Jackson's suggestion that curriculum design is not a linear process, and that any number of factors in one area influence decisions in other areas (Jackson et al. 2002, p.4). Indeed, and as discussed in the literature review, Moon (2002) concedes that her approach is not necessarily the way that people actually do it, and in 2002 Knight put forward the idea that design could be assessment-led. The interviewees in this project indicated that, in some instances, this could well be the case, which is contrary to the findings of Price et al. (2011 p.480) whereby the role of assessment is considered to be weakened, as it is often an afterthought. However, in this project, we have seen that for a good number of interviewees, their experience of re-designing the assessment is an aforethought. One thing to bear in mind is that many of the respondents were foregrounding assessment with regards to resource intensity rather than educational purpose.

However, thinking about assessment at the beginning of the design process wasn't how all interviewees designed their modules. Four people said that assessment design was an iterative process or that it came after determining the aims and outcomes. Two people commented that they consider the assessment:

"Usually after I've marked. When I've marked it – and it's been through the exam board. I'll think if we need to change it – so we tend to do it then." (T5,4,128)

"I do the module design in the same way that the module descriptor's laid out. So I start at the beginning and end at the end and the assessment tends to come about halfway through. But having said that, you can't just start at the beginning and end at the end, you need to think when you're thinking about your learning aims erm – there has to be the same sort of realism about how you can check whether people have learnt it or not, so ... that's a bit more than a holistic process than it sounds." (T12,3,86).

About half of the interviewees expressed that the assessment used in their module was not their ideal choice. One person said:

"... sometimes the assessment is just a guess, just kind of – well this will do." (T12,4,112)

Chapter 5 revealed that the most important factors that questionnaire respondents took into account when they considered the type of assessment were class size, assessments already used in the degree programme, staff and student workloads, the learning experience and student feedback. Other influences in assessment included subject benchmarks and professional bodies. Twenty-one people ticked the 'other' box and all of them elaborated on this response. Eight of these respondents indicated that they considered the intended learning outcomes and two said that they considered 'the curriculum as a whole'. Eight respondents also wrote qualitative comments that could clearly be grouped together under the umbrella of 'consideration of students'. These included *"something that will grip the students' imagination and that they will enjoy doing", "student ability. e.g. using coursework where students consistently struggle with exams", "student workload, practical considerations", "students' learning experience and whether or not the assessment encourages a deep approach to learning"* and *"what will best assist students in absorbing the knowledge from the module so that they can build on it in their own practice".*

Questionnaire respondents were also asked which two factors were the most important to them when they were planning assessments. These were open responses, and almost all the qualitative comments could be grouped under three headings. The first was the 'consideration of students' and covered *"work that will interest the students", "I start with what I want the student to be able to do, what I think they will enjoy/find valuable, "primarily the extent to which the assessment adequately measures student progress in the module in a fair way" and "will this motivate the student? How can I make this as interesting as possible?".* The second theme was 'purpose' in that *"will it do*

what it says on the tin – can students achieve the outcomes? What added value in there in the assessment type" and "the foremost factor in selecting the mode of assessment is the appropriateness of the assessment for testing the knowledge and skills I am trying to develop through the module".

These responses aligned with the findings of Meyers and Nulty (2009), who argue that the assessment task cements and sequences all the other module components and that the role of assessment is central to curriculum design because it is something that students also look at first. The concept of cementing the other module components was raised by a third of interviewees. One person expressed:

"*So I teach to the assessment. And each week, whatever we cover, at some point in that lecture I will say 'how might this link to the assessment of this module – why do you think we have been looking at this 'now'? Why is this important, how are you going to incorporate it into your group presentation, how are you going to incorporate it into your written assignment …"* (T10,5,146).

One person took a different stance:

"... sometimes the assessment isn't about assessing the students, it's also about assessing the module sometimes, because if you get it all right, then it all fits nicely together and actually you shouldn't have any surprises when you get your answers back from the students." (T13,5,177)

The third theme from the survey question concerning the consideration of the assessment was 'institutional practice' and respondents stated that *"institutional practice sometimes feels restrictive, but I do feel that I have to stick to it (or problems at XX* (internal validating body) *etc so that is important, but not always in a positive way ...".*

6.3.2.2 Constraints affecting assessment design

How and for what reasons staff chose a particular mode of assessment was not always the product of an actual design process. Sometimes it was a

result of the constraints that came to light during the interviews. For the majority of people in this study, assessment design *was* overtly influenced by class size, student ability, professional requirements, the student pass rate, and where the assessment had gone badly wrong. When discussing the effects of workload on the assessment choice interviewees said:

"*I guess what I'm ashamed of is that I design the assessment around my workload and what I can cope with, rather than what could be best for the module and I admit to that."* (T3,3,158)

"I don't think we can begin to introduce what might be seen as stunningly wonderful innovative assessment in the benefit of students when you've got 150 students, and 8 staff." (T23,3,105)

"I could get them to do a series of reports, but that would be so intense, and intensive on me that I couldn't carry on doing it to be honest." (T3,5,153)

In one instance, the word 'ashamed' was raised, just as in the previous theme (pressures and constraints). However, the overriding message in the above statements is that staff were adopting strategies in order to cope with their workload. Indeed, participants in the ethnographic study by Hemera (2014) employed a number of coping strategies, including using online assessments that were computer marked, so as to give themselves more time for other tasks. In this study interviewees said that as a result of increased workload they were seriously considering student peer assessment type work in order to reduce the pressure of marking.

For the most part, people spoke about their experiences around assessment choice quite openly. They were just things that they did in order to cope.

Indeed, Anderson et al. (2002) have advocated that larger classes have had an impact on staff's choice of assessment. In addition Goos and Hughes (2010) recognised that workload issues and resource implications are an important factor, and Hemera (2014) found that her participants looked at reducing the number of assessments to lessen the marking load.

A couple of the interviewees suggested that they had, in general, felt that they had to change the type of assessment in order to improve the student pass rate. On analysis, these expressed experiences of designing assessment around student achievement were considered to be the result of both a constraint and a design strategy. As already highlighted above, they were coming from the 'top-down', i.e. from management level.

One interviewee in this study spoke about how the student achievement (measured by the pass rate) effected a change of assessment design, and how-s/he navigated their way through this change:

“.... I'll give you an example of a change that I made – last semester ... there were quite a lot of people who failed it – they just didn't kind of get it ... I'd set quite an unusual assessment that I thought they would enjoy and they just struggled. I decided that one way of getting people to pass – because we were being told – top suits were saying ... we don't need fails, we need people passing your modules ... That's a pressure – for people to pass modules – as many people as possible. So I emailed X, my Head of Division and said ... can I seek some advice ... I would like to change it (the assessment) to a more standard academic essay that I think people would feel comfortable ... make it shorter – so 1,500 words rather than 3,000 words and have a group presentation ... Now, the real reason I wanted to make these changes was because I wanted more people to pass. Well I had to put through the paperwork for making changes to the module descriptor … so I said the learning outcomes of this module are … this assessment will allow you to meet these by … de de de de – you know … so you ticked that box – but actually it's all a bit crooked I suppose …” (laugh) (very long pause). (T10,4,113)

The use of the word 'crooked' was interesting. After checking with the interviewee, s/he was using the term to describe a practice that she thought was not professional. The degree programme that s/he designed modules for is a professionally accredited one and that explains his/her use of the term. Nevertheless, this person was using the assessment design as a tool by

which to achieve a desired outcome for a professionally validated body. As such, Deneen and Boud (2013, p.580) assert that *"... assessment generates material by students. If tasks are well constructed, it produces evidence that may allow valid interpretations of student achievement. For this reason, assessment is an especially attractive area to focus on in quality assurance and audit procedures."*

Sometimes this desired outcome, which is passing students, did not work out as well as was planned. One interviewee explained how the team had put great effort, above other considerations, into developing the assessment:

"… it's really easy for the assessment to take over …and we'd done so much change with the assessment er that it had started to drift away from the learning outcomes ... and our external examiner picked up on that … the brand new external examiner would not agree the marks ... He put his foot down and said no. And er there was a terrible turmoil, and it was a very scary time ..." (T16, 6,171).

What the above analysis reveals is that the assessment is an important measure of the experience of module design. For example, if one is faced with teaching a very large class, then the class size impacts on the choice of assessment. Alternatively, if one is teaching a cohort of students who do not have the required skills for a particular type or level of assessment, then tweaks and amendments are put into place in order to accommodate what you have to work with. This is not necessarily a negative view, it is often a strategic one, as review, and redesign can be a desirable necessity. Indeed designing modules around resource issues such as the availability of staff, subject knowledge, finance, teaching equipment and time to mark assessments was a huge consideration for the participants in this project. The following extract was typical:

"Well, pressures around marking and assessment, especially for large groups. There is an issue, for example in XX (module) – if you are teaching a module with 200 students on, do you want 200 4,000-word essays? And the

answer to that is no, you don't and I think that for me, the pressures come aboard particularly in assessment ..." (T4,2.70)**.**

The implications of this suggest that academics will consider the implications of a particular mode of assessment on their workload and perceived ability to be able to mark the assessment by the set institutional deadlines. The above statement implied that a form of assessment would be dismissed and substituted with an alternative mode of assessment that was less onerous to mark. The latter could be just as effective as the first in measuring student attainment, it could be better, or it could be less adequate. Indeed, Goos and Hughes observed that *"Government reforms resulting in larger class sizes ... and altered student characteristics and behaviours have … impacted on the quality of assessment …"* (2010, p.316).

6.3.2.3 Assessment design as an individual activity

The interview data suggested that assessment design was more of an individual exercise rather than a collaborative one. However, collaboration with staff or other academics also took place. One interviewee explained that:

"... we think about, we have to take into account what the whole assessment burden is on the students, we have to think about and ensure that there is a variety of assessment methods throughout the course … once we've got a module, we try to think about what assessment model would serve best to actually assess the learning outcomes of that module and then once we've made that decision we look at the balance across all the modules ... this is a kind of collective exercise." (T6,5,143)

What emerged from the interviews was that when the assessment design concerned an individual module, it was more of an individual activity. This fits with Boud and Falchicov's suggestion that the *"detailed design and execution of assessment tasks* (are) *often being considered only by the person responsible for each unit of study ..."* (2007 p.190). Collaborative efforts in this study were more likely when the module assessment was being considered alongside other assessments in the programme.

The impact of students on the assessment, and module design and redesign as a whole was an overriding theme in this project. This master theme and the emerging sub-themes are discussed next.

6.3.3 Master Theme 3: The impact of students on the practice of module design

When survey respondents were asked which aids they used to help them design curricula, the vast majority of responses were comprised of tick box answers. However, 15 people wrote qualitative responses. Whilst about two-thirds of peoples' responses supported Bamber et al.'s (2009) theoretical work, one strand of responses was more dominant, and this concerned the consideration of students. This was not a surprise as Beetham (2009) suggests that influences seen to be influential upon module design include learners' outcomes and needs and in this study, this master theme produced five sub-themes: 'student feedback', 'student needs', 'existing student skill sets and designing for student abilities', 'marketability and future students' and 'student involvement in design'.

Two questionnaire survey respondents in this study mentioned that their own personal histories and past experiences of teaching students were important. They wrote: *"my own experience of how students learn and what they need to be taught", "... I based my curriculum on 13 years' experience of giving IT support to students – so I had a fair idea of what they needed to learn".*

A lot of the qualitative survey data centred on the needs of students, and a dominant pattern of responses meant that it became clear that generally, the interviewees were quite student-oriented in that they tried to ensure that students were satisfied with their courses, were being taught to a high standard, and were being assessed adequately. For example, when asked what their practice of module design was most commonly influenced by, four people ticked 'student feedback'.

In the qualitative interviews, interviewees were asked the following question:

'What are you trying to achieve in the process of designing, reviewing or redesigning a module?'

This question elicited much data that centred on the needs of students and it became clear that generally the interviewees were quite student-oriented in that they tried to ensure that students were satisfied with their courses, were being taught to a high standard, and were being assessed adequately. From this data emerged a number of 'sub-themes' in which responses concerning how students affected the process of design and redesign could be grouped into a number of categories. The first was 'student feedback'**.**

6.3.3.1 Student feedback

Interviewees took module feedback seriously (as they are required to do) even though the number of students who gave feedback was less than staff would have liked:

"… the quality of feedback from the end of module feedback forms is very useful but the number of students that complete it – it's almost pointless – it's so disheartening, and I varied the way of doing it, but it was very much at the end of every session, and that led to tweaks, rather than a total overhaul ..." (T7,2,63)

"*It's always quite minimal the feedback, on XX* (the method by which to view on-line feedback) *and the people who do feedback give quite a lot of information but there's not that many that go on and do that. So I do read that, and I do take it seriously and I do adapt things ..."* (T3,3,104).

One interviewee remarked that having a good relationship with the students was necessary in order to receive the required feedback to review and subsequently redesign modules:

"... having a good relationship is crucial. And with the students it's vital because they give me the best feedback on how to tweak the curriculum ...". (T19,4,128).

Two interviewees talked at great length about the role of the students in the design of assessment. Their role was recognised either via their existing skill-sets, and/or by assessing other students. Interviewees remarked that:

" … last year one of the comments that I got was that the final assignment that I set them … I was told that they were set at too high a level academically and the students reflected that in their comments and so I have changed the final assessment this time around ...". (T1,3,82)

"... the student experience is a big pressure, certainly when it comes to assessment because students feel very strongly on how they are assessed and it's impossible to please everyone all of the time …" (T16, 6,190)

One observation from this project was the effect that negative student feedback had on staff and that they felt a pressure to 'perform'. In their online survey Goos and Hughes (2010, p.316) reported that *"In this increasingly competitive higher education market, students are often viewed as consumers who must be kept satisfied ...".*

Indeed the issue of changing the assessment as a result of students' comments was mentioned by a number of staff and, despite putting a lot of thought into what was perceived by the tutor to be an interesting or rewarding assessment, such efforts were not always well received and nearly half of the interviewees felt that they were not always able to please everyone all of the time. One person said:

"… there have been plenty of times when I've come up with an assessment and have just been giggling with glee at how much fun it's going to be and they're just not been on board at all and that's been a big surprise …" (T16, 8, 245).

This comment was conveyed positively by the interviewee in that s/he accepted that this was how things sometimes worked out, but it was not a constraint in that it didn't deter him/her from trying an alternative assessment design.

However, there was no evidence of staff feeling obliged to design the assessment around student preferences.

6.3.3.2 Student needs

When theming the interview data, it was noted that the responses concerning the impact of students on the practice of module design accrued more data than any other theme. One of the sub-themes that had the most impact on the design and review experience was 'thinking about student needs'. Two of the interviewees in the study by Norton et al. (2010) stated that whilst they felt a responsibility towards the success of the students, in the end it was up to the students themselves. However, in this study, the overriding consensus amongst interviewees was that it was the responsibility of staff to ensure that the design of the module, and its place in the degree programme, was sufficiently clear so that students could see what was required of them. Staff were aware of the 'different language' used in universities compared with schools or further education colleges (these are an example of what Bamber et al. (2009, p.9) refer to as the *"discourses, the particular forms of talk and writing etc, which are mediated by deeper social forces and social structures"*) and they made efforts to approach the design as if they were a student. One interviewee said:

"... because it's a skills module I really wanted to make sure that we take into account that they're first years, that they're coming straight from school, they're coming into a very different environment and sometimes at university we speak a very different language without realising that ..." (T13,1,29).

As stated above, almost all interviewees mentioned how they took into account the needs of students when they designed, reviewed and redesigned modules. This response was typical:

"... I think students have to be up-most in our minds when we make these decisions because that's what we're supposed to be here for … you can give in to a certain extent to the pressures that you know are there, like the financial, political … that sort of thing you know what is right and what is

wrong ... but at the end of the day we are here to teach students and that is what we should be working towards really … " (T1,4,134).

The vast majority of interviewees were very mindful of student needs when designing and enhancing their curricula but, for a few, there were other things that needed to be considered. One of the interviewees in this study said:

"You do consider general behaviour, motivation of students in relation to say coursework that involves teamwork, so how likely are the students to work together in a team – what's your ability to actually make them overcome problems and be involved if you like and encourage them to work as a unit." (T15,5,179)

However, and despite the above considerations, two interviewees felt that taking account of student needs didn't always equate to 'happy students'. Two interviewees explained how they spent a considerable amount of time trying to make modules more user-friendly, but that it had not been well received:

"... we have had accusations of 'it's a do it yourself delivery programme' erm the 3rd year students, particularly last year were very discouraged towards the end of the year, we didn't get a very good NSS score, erm surprisingly we had erm over 20 out of 38 who were graduating who had first class honours ..." (T21,2,44).

"... students were really unhappy … but I'd been so worried about getting the method of assessing the theory right, that … students had kind of suffered because we were trying to find a practical way of making it happen, that we became so focussed on the assessment of the theory … it was there in the curriculum but it was in directed study – it was in directed study sheets which nobody read – so we had to bring that back into the taught sessions and that's one of the reasons why I'm so very pleased to have a very rigorous external examiner because it's so easy not to see the wood for the trees when you're trying very hard to get assessments right." (T16,6,184)

In both of these accounts there was a mismatch between what staff believed was acceptable and what was perceived in the real world. Indeed Norton et al. (2013) found that whilst staff felt there was little incentive to be innovative, students were less enthusiastic about it too.

But for all this, the overriding consensus amongst interviewees was that it was the job of staff to facilitate learning and to encourage students to grasp what was required of them. One interviewee remarked that:

"I think clarity for students is quite important erm and (to) design something that I will enjoy teaching that I think students will get something from ... the main thing is to make something that has an aim, has a purpose, has an end that they will learn something from, and that they will enjoy and be stimulated by it and I think overall clear to them why they're doing it (laugh)." (T8,4,104)

This statement leads us onto the next emerging sub-theme, whereby a discussion of designing modules for students is offered.

6.3.3.3 Existing student skill sets and designing for student abilities

In this study, the characteristics and cultural context of the students was important in the change process (Bamber et al. 2009) as there was an overriding consensus amongst the interviewees that the learning profiles of incoming undergraduates had changed (although not for the better in their opinion) and that in the interviewees' experience, the content, delivery and (as we have seen in the previous master theme) the assessment of modules was having to also change in order to adapt to this trend.

Half of the interviewees mentioned that their modules incorporated learning skills that were not only important for a student, but also for a graduate. Indeed the University of Birmingham's T-Sparc project (2009 section 2) reported that *"the starting point* (in curriculum design) *was the consideration of the types of skills required by students in the workplace".* Interviewees were very aware of what was required by future employees and these requirements were one of the things that drove their design. Thus through

design, and the interactions at work, the identity of students was being shaped.

Interviewees wanted students to be inspired and they wanted their modules to be fun and engaging, although this was still in academic terms, whereby students had to inspire and think for themselves too. This approach emerged in the work by Fearon, in which he suggested that that *"a curriculum should encourage the student to develop themselves through 'independent learning' … This should be in addition to the key skills and knowledge we teach them but does rely on the students (sic) own self-motivation"* (Fearon 2008, p.188).

There was also evidence that interviewees were incorporating existing student skills, prior experience and student abilities into their curricula and assessments in order to keep up with changing trends. The following interview extract was typical:

"... there's a balance between what would I like my students to be able to do, and what is fair to ask them to do depending on what experience they've had before, and also what staffing to cope with, so I do genuinely start with 'these are the outcomes that I think very appropriate' and what do I need to do with the students to get there." (T7,3,81)

One person spoke positively about how academics needed to keep up with the changing skill sets of today's students:

"... one of their (the students') *final assessments is a poster presentation that includes research design for a research project ... they were all so engaged with it, they all done so well, not one of them failed. And I was anticipating one – at least one- complete disaster – there wasn't one ... And what had struck me was that it was engaging them in ways using visual presentation, it wasn't just a written essay or exam – and I thought that this is using skills which young people nowadays actually have more of and so this year I've changed one of my assessments on X module from an exam to an essay to where they can incorporate visual and other elements, cos I thought – you know they're not as engaged with words as people in my generation, they are*

more visually engaged and not taking account of that isn't getting the best out of our students … I think they have different skills and don't think that we design assessments to use the skills that modern students have." (T4,4,114)

The study by Roberts (2015), which explored how academics make curriculum decisions by focussing particularly on the influence of their own active research, found that for staff who were working within the arts and social sciences, *"the curriculum was shaped by selecting topics and themes that were relevant to students' experiences and interests"* (ibid. p.547). As such, the topic of research was perceived to be influential upon the subject choice within the curriculum (Roberts, 2015, p.547).

Another interviewee commented that the issue of addressing existing student abilities varied from year to year depending on the cohort:

"There are some years where I'll explain something that I think is going to be challenging for them and they understand perfectly, and other years which I think is really simple, which they find challenging, and it's not very consistent – they look at the same slides every year, but it seems to vary between groups …" (T9,3,89).

Half of the interviewees mentioned that their modules incorporated learning skills that were not only important for a student but also for their future, i.e. when they left university. One person said:

"*I've written nine modules from scratch in the last three or four years. It's so specialist the kind of stuff that I do ... It's like writing a detective novel – working from the ending – you start from the outcome and work your way backwards and for me the outcome is always the industry – about getting them towards a job – about getting those key employability skills ..."* (T16,1,6).

This was something that Roberts (2015) noted, in that *"…general skills were expressed as learning outcomes to thinking and learning, doing research and professional and workplace skills"* (Roberts, 2015, p.550)

About a quarter of interviewees suggested that one of their more positive and enjoyable drivers for module design and redesign was getting students excited and/or interested in the module, even if it meant challenging their abilities. One person said:

"... I really want them (the modules) to be fun – they need to be fun and engaging. There are times when I know that I'm being really devil's advocate and putting students under a lot of pressure … I'm very very clear about what the pressure is … why it's there, and what they will benefit from ... I have their best interests at heart and I will bend over backwards to make the assessment something they can engage in … that's one of the most creative part of curriculum design which I really enjoy ..." (T16,7,236).

Whilst Anderson (2011, p.72) suggests that *"Universities are increasingly facing a changing student profile necessitating considerations of their specific needs, interests and expectations when designing curricula … the changing times and student context means that staff are under pressure to be more innovative and scholarly".* What shone through the responses was the desire for students to do well, and that module design was a vehicle by which to achieve this goal, and that it was a challenge that many staff rose to.

Indeed there was a sense that academics felt an overriding obligation to students despite expressing that they were time and resource-starved. As such, Fitzmaurice (2013, p.614) advocates that, *"as early-career academics pursue their identity projects, they struggle with many issues and demands on their time, and core values are in evidence as they make professional judgements and develop in their role"*. In this project, there was evidence of cognitive dissonance whereby interviewees have two conflicting attitudes.

Firstly, interviewees were emotionally and intellectually wedded to doing their best for students. Secondly they repeatedly cited that there was a lack of available time to design and redesign modules, even when they expressed regret and/or shame about the quality of what they produced.

Yet interviewees articulated that they go out of their way to re-write lectures (but not design curricula), change assessments and offer academic support in order to accommodate the changing needs of students. As Churchman (2006) asserts, there was evidence in this project of a *"righteous moral discourse of 'making a difference' in terms of student learning"* (cited in Winter 2009, p.127).

Goos and Hughes reported that *"Academics report feeling obliged to make course content and assessment less challenging in order to obtain positive student evaluations ..."* (2010, p. 318). However, in this study there was some evidence that suggested that this practice wasn't favoured:

"... you know I think the value of education is how, as seen by the students at the time, and if you change things just to keep the students happy it doesn't always provide the best educational experience." (T21,2,44)

There was evidence that interviewees were incorporating existing student skills and student academic abilities into their curricula and assessments in order to keep abreast of changing student profiles. The following three extracts were typical:

"I always have to look at ... what the students have already done, the level that they're at, and what their capabilities are – this has a massive influence on determining what I do and how I do it ... the majority of the students that I deal with are just not XX (subject matter) minded and so over the years ... I deliberately try to keep XX content to a minimum ... but try to make it more robust and vigorous as I can at the same time. And this has taken a lot of time and development, but I think I've got to a stage where I think it works pretty well." (T6,4,118)

"The core factors that really establish the primary constraints about what I'm going to be doing is the level of the students – I've got to think about where the students are coming from and where they are already ... and all the realistic expectations about how far I can take them – it's a constant tension ..." (T6,6,196)

"... as time goes on is what I felt strongly is that the majority of my students need more help ... that that feels quite scary. I don't think they've been given those skills at school to come to university and get on and join the dots that will allow them to write a good assignment so it has definitely changed... for my first years – erm – in my tutor seminars ... we are, actually give them worksheets, the sort of worksheets that I would have done in High School. ... so yes it's changed, it's evolved, in response to the needs of the students I think ..." (T10,5,161).

This last quote in particular demonstrated how much effort many of the interviewees are making in order to enhance the changing student experience.

6.3.3.4 Marketability and future students

As mentioned in the initial chapters of this thesis, this study took place during a period of social and economic change within the sector. It has become increasingly important that university programmes and the modules within them are marketed to attract and retain a generation of students with an eclectic mix of skills and educational backgrounds. Some of the data explored in the master themes (above) suggest that this can create a tension, particularly in module design, as academics can no longer design or redesign modules in the way that they would like, or which embrace the subjects that they would like to teach, or measure attainment in the traditional academic way.

Rather, modules are now designed for a number of reasons, including attracting new students and the future proofing of a programme. People no longer have a portfolio of pet modules related to their interests. This issue was raised by Douglas (2013) in his study of 11 social sciences professors who were advising academics how they could still be research-active whilst teaching, particularly when the time spent on one activity directly affects the available time for the other.

During the interviews a couple of the interviewees talked about writing modules to attract future students:

"...in the end you want people to come and do those modules, and therefore I think about – you know - is this module going to be appealing?" (T20,7,222).

Interestingly, when interviewees talked about the marketability of modules, they did not mention student abilities or needs unless they were related to the interest of a module. Addressing student needs was something that staff accommodated once the students had arrived.

6.3.3.5 Student involvement in design

To cope with the constraint of limited resources, particularly where the assessment was concerned, a couple of interviewees talked about students being (indirectly) involved in the design, review and redesign process. They said:

"Well, one thing I've been moving towards is erm including more student assessment – I'm attracted to the idea of it – there's a selfish bit of me that thinks well if I can get the students to assess themselves – there's less work for me ..." (T19,5,144).

"I'm more and more coming round to the view of ... a learning process where the students are getting feedback all of the time from ... the peers within their group, from inter-groups, which is monitored and mediated in the session by the lecturer so the quantity and quality of the feedback they are getting has shot up without necessarily more time on marking – the feedback by the lecturer" (T5,5,159).

It is clear from these statements that student involvement in design is limited to their involvement in the marking process, and the benefits that this brings to the lecturer, rather than the actual design of the assessment.

However, a number of staff did say that they indirectly involved students in the 'tweaking' process via verbal and written feedback, and by discussing ideas with them. But there were no expressions of direct involvement in new

modules, and this was because of historically perceived (by staff) student inexperience, insufficient student knowledge of the subject area and the design process itself. Two interviewees quite firmly commented that:

"But designing a first ever, designing a brand new module, I have not engaged with students in doing that, and I'm not convinced it would be helpful very much either." (T7,6,200)

"I would never involve students in the (new) *design of an assessment, I never have and I never will. Students are important, but they are not the be and end all"* (T14, 2,70).

However, it should be noted that design practice at the university studied in this project has changed more recently (and especially since the data was collected) in order to involve students in the process.

The issue of the impact of students in module design, review and redesign was a significant master theme. It was expected that by virtue of the sector that was being researched the subject of students would hold a dominant presence in the resulting data. Nevertheless, the amount of data produced by this theme was huge and what has been presented here is a fraction of what emerged. As mentioned above, one significant and recurring trait of the data was that staff were wedded to doing their very best for students, despite the constraints already discussed in the sections above.

One of the emerging sub-themes concerning the impact of students on module design, review and redesign centred on using appropriate language for students (and other audiences) in institutional documents. This is discussed as part of the next master theme.

6.3.4 Master Theme 4: Documentation

Bamber et al. (2009, p.9), in their description of socio-cultural theory, state that *"when preparing a new syllabus, enhancing an existing course or preparing to teach a module, people within universities use artefacts and tools of various sorts ..."*. The artefacts and tools that will be discussed in this

section are the documents that module designers either write or use (because they are pre-written) in the design process. The discussion is located within four emerging sub-themes: 'the purpose of documents', 'institutional approval', 'writing for other audiences' and 'writing style and language'.

As stated in Chapter 5, 68 respondents were experienced in designing a new module. When respondents were asked at what point they started designing their module, their responses varied significantly. This was possibly because the question was enquiring about two things: designing a module, and completing a module descriptor template. It was revealed in Chapter 5 that 16 people said that they did not start at the beginning of the template. Thirteen respondents wrote additional remarks and many of these could be grouped into four categories. These were 'I start with the learning outcomes', I start with the learning outcomes, but then go to assessment, 'the syllabus', and 'I don't use the template'.

One of the interview questions was designed to find out who the interviewees were writing module design documents for. This was something that had not been explored in the questionnaire, as the purpose of the survey was to find out how people designed their modules by asking what influenced their experiences. But because the follow-on interviews were designed to provide a deeper insight into peoples' experiences of design and redesign, interviewees were asked the following question:

> *'**Which audiences do you have in mind for the documents that you might produce?'***

The responses to this question are discussed next.

6.3.4.1 The purpose of documents

When considering their response to this question, a number of interviewees talked about the 'purpose' of documents. The following response was typical, and whilst it perhaps revealed poor professional practice, this might even be practice which is normalised within higher education:

“Well, to be perfectly honest, and honesty is what you want, those documents don't shape tactical decisions on the shop floor – okay. In fact they're statements of intent – they're documents that say – this is what we want, to report what we do, and if for any reason students want to do anything else, or identify a particular need and it's a one of particular, then I wouldn't really worry about those documents ... My impression of the university as a whole is that there's only a vague similarity between module descriptors and teaching … Erm – I mean I've taught modules in the university, for which I've not been module leader without ever seeing a module descriptor or a syllabus ... and in fact I can tell you I've been in the situation where at the end of a module I've been asked to complete the module leader’s evaluation – marks and look at how well it went etc – and at that point I've had to ask for the module descriptor to be able to answer the questions – until that point is was totally irrelevant … I sense that some of my colleagues perhaps pay even less attention to module descriptors when they are the module leader ... I don't think I'm the only one who gives it passing consideration.” (T17,2,44)

This interviewee also defined what a 'module descriptor' meant for him/her and how this affected how they approached the document:

“... there's an assumption that the module descriptor is a blueprint for teaching as opposed to a record for teaching – the two seem to be totally different when all we are doing is making sure that what we do is making sure that what we do is actually recorded ...” (T17,3,110).

This interviewee expressed that s/he viewed module descriptors as bureaucratic documents that were generally unread and unrelated to real design or what goes on in the classroom. However, not all interviewees felt like this. Indeed whilst the interview question (mentioned in 6.3.4 above) focussed on the writing of all design documents, the vast majority of the responses concerned the module descriptors – the design template if you like, These were seen to be by a quarter of the interviewees to be their 'bible' or legal framework of the aims/objectives, the mode of delivery and the

assessment for any particular module. The following comment was typical:

“Well the module descriptor's kind of the legislative framework of the module ... the XX students often do go and look at it, and they know what they're going to get ...” (T12,1,32).

This quote suggested that using the module descriptor as a tool to present the module content and outline was considered to be good practice. However, the University of Strathclyde ‘Principles in Patterns’ (PiP) project (2010, section 4.1) found that *“although key university documents including learning and teaching strategies, module descriptor forms and programme specification forms are important signallers of good practice in design, they are only one part of a much more complex picture of influences ...”*.

This was because this study, like the one by Cross (2009, p.63), found that the purpose of such documents was also to validate the module content. The descriptors were written for external examiners, and in particular the institutional validating body. Indeed the University of Birmingham's T-Sparc project noted that *“it was felt that the primary audience for programme documentation was the Approval Panel. Although there was an understanding that programme documentation had a number of audiences (in theory) the crucial nature of satisfying the approval panel meant that documentation was written with (almost exclusively) that audience in mind ... There was a sense that programme documentation was 'for the University' rather than for the course team, students or employers”* (T-Sparc blog 2012b – 'Audience'). This issue is discussed next.

6.3.4.2 Institutional approval

A number of interviewees in this survey mentioned that the documentation was written with the Approval Panel in mind. For example, one interviewee suggested that:

“... there's always a disconnect between what a module descriptor says and what we say we're going to do ... so it would just be a bureaucratic exercise, a piece of paper to produce. So at the end point there is a document that

conforms to the organisation's expectation of what a module descriptor should be ... it's a document that is required to say this what we do round here ..." (T17,1,20).

Over half of the interviewees described how, in their experience, institutional rigidity influenced their approach to completing a module descriptor, which impacted on the design process.

"I don't like module descriptors ... because they (the module descriptors) *make people write a module descriptor in a vacuum almost. We don't write module descriptors when we're actually really thinking about module design – we write them to a deadline that fits with the university process. It actually has very little to do with how we're designing our module, so if I had to write a module descriptor over a weekend, I would try and draft a module descriptor that was sufficiently vague to allow me to really come back to it and think about module design ..."* (T13,2,62).

This interviewee was indicating that s/he would complete the form to the minimal requirements but, in writing the descriptor so loosely, it would give the wiggle-room to independently review and redesign the module at a later stage, without institutional interference or the need for approval. This was something that Beetham reported in that *"many staff would prefer modules and programmes to be loosely specified, giving scope for iterative enhancement and innovation (and greater ownership of the process by individual teaching staff) without having to seek re-approval"* (2009, section C). This can be viewed as a positive strategy, but only if a loosely written document is accepted by the validating body. It has already been presented in Chapter 6 that over half of interviewees expressed that their experiences of writing the module design documents were part of a 'bureaucratic' exercise, and that others felt that there was little flexibility. One interviewee remarked that:

"... the process – once these module descriptors are approved, and it becomes a bureaucratic process and a validation process and XX (internal validating body) *process ... it's unwieldy and it's not helpful ..."* (T12,5,143).

As mentioned in section 6.3.1.2, the approval body in the university used in this research considers programmes as a whole, and as part of that approval process, reviews and examines individual modules within those programmes. The University of Birmingham's T-Sparc project reported that their *"(2009) baseline review revealed that when programme teams designed (or redesigned) courses they felt they spent a disproportionate amount of time 'preparing for an approval event' rather than 'designing a course"* (T-Sparc 2012a, p.1). The project further commented that *"Staff in the University are well versed in what is required of them in terms of documentation at the point of approval and for the most part they are effective in meeting that expectation. Where this may be problematic is when the documentation itself becomes the focus of our work rather than the programme. In such cases, it was felt that a context of tight adherence to documentary requirements might not create the best environment to support innovation in curriculum design"* (University of Birmingham 2012b T-Sparc blog - Compliance).

In fact, rather than expressing the 'social reality' (Bamber et al. 2009), this study has revealed that writing module design documents was perceived to be a 'bureaucratic' exercise which had no impact on what actually happened in the classroom. This finding was echoed in the T-Sparc project which found that institutions often place too much importance on the document produced by a process rather than the reflective process themselves (JISC 2010a, p.1). Indeed the experiences of the above interviewees were good examples of an observation made by Beetham (2009, section D). She noted that *"Existing documentation typically takes little account of how educational designers actually think about learning, teaching and assessment, what information they use, what conversations they have, and how the curriculum 'looks to those at the cutting edge."* (Beetham 2009, section D)

6.3.4.3 Writing for other audiences

When writing their documents, interviewees in this project wrote them for particular audiences. A large number of interviewees remarked that students were their priority audience. Two people said:

"… I write in plain English … I try to keep in the first person, I try to keep it active, I try to keep it focussed on the student, you know, it's not academic writing in the third person or anything like that. And would write the same if I was writing for XX (internal validating body) *as well ... I sit on a XX* (internal validating body)*, a lot of the documentation that comes through is so pretentious ..."* (T5,3,93).

"*I guess I prepare documents really for the students and also for myself. The module booklets are my bibles I suppose and I use them with the students throughout the teaching period."* (T14,2,37)

However 12 of the interviewees were of the opinion that students never looked at the documents, which was something that was raised by an interviewee in the University of Birmingham's T-Sparc blog (2012b 'Representation') in that *"when a student thumbs through those paper-based module templates, do you think they really get excited by what they read?"*.

In this project and, despite almost all the interviewees expressing that they wrote some documents with students in mind, this ethos did not extend to the module descriptors. Interviewees explained their rationale for this by stating that:

"I wouldn't expect them (students) *to just go and read the module descriptor ... I don't think I've ever pointed students at module descriptors and probably never will do.****"*** (T15,3,95)

"*The module descriptor – I actually think the audience is probably tiny - I don't think my students look at it – it's in the module handbook – I honestly think they don't look at it."* (T10,2,61)

"... the module descriptor is for university administration. The stuff that I put in the handbook, all the information I write for the students … if I was a student I would be bored by the time I would get to page three erm – if I got to page three ..." (T13,3,103)

About two-thirds of interviewees said that they wrote the documents for other audiences within the university:

"The module descriptor I write for university administrators ... if I don't write it for the university administrators they just come back ... if I write it for students it would not get past the university administration." (T13,3,100)

"I want to make sure they are academically very rigorous – definitely have external examiners in mind – I have senior managers in mind – I want to make sure that everyone can look at these documents and get something from them …" (T16,4,120).

Overall, therefore, the interviewees gave the impression that considerable thought was given to writing documents either for a particular social audience, a range of audiences or, more commonly, for the approval panel. Having discussed who the documents were written for, the next section outlines the style of writing used to write them.

6.3.4.4 Writing style and language

A number of interviewees said that they wrote their design documents very loosely so that they were not 'tied in' to a design which included promises that they could not later meet. This finding is illustrated by the following extracts:

"... I think the trick is to write module descriptors in the way that gives you forms of flexibility, so you can put down a 2,500 word assignment and then you can decide, well actually I can, within this assignment, do something a bit more exciting … if you put down essay, you're less flexible." (T4,4,141)

" ... if you're too specific, every time you want to go through a change you've got to go through the whole procedure again, send it to hundreds of different people for approval ..." (T11,1,34).

These experiences are good examples of something that Beetham (2009, section C) reported in that *"Because you have a template you have to follow; that, in some way, stifles creativity"*.

On the other hand, one interviewee said that, in their opinion, the language used for writing module descriptors was too generic, and was therefore 'meaningless':

"I mean we write such generic stuff ... I mean you know you could copy and paste them across the University and I'm sure institutions across higher education – you know and what always makes me laugh is that I suspect if we look at A level syllabuses, undergraduate degrees, masters levels, we'd see exactly the same blandishments thrown." (T17,5,157)

This interviewee elaborated on his/her answer by saying that:

"The community that I choose to work in – i.e. higher education has an expectation about the sort of language and the sort of ideas that these sort of documents perpetuate, if you like, or create... and therefore, kinds of generic, meaningless terms – I'll say meaningless ... it's just to legitimise the process of education ... that's how it is – that's the language we use, that's the rituals and I just go along with the ritual (laugh) ... it's a particular way of seeing educational higher education in terms of you know, measurable outcomes and meaningless buzzwords – I'm not going to change it – so just use the language hopefully". (T17,2,54)

This interviewee was referring to the specific language that, like other industries and sectors, is used in academia. This is akin to Bamber et al.'s (2009, p.9) observation that *"discourses, the particular forms of talk and writing etc, which are mediated by deeper social forces and social structures, express social reality and also operate to constrain and delimit it".*

Indeed, one interviewee in the report produced by Beetham (2009, section C) asked, *"Are we prisoners of tradition? Academic language can constrain thinking about curriculum design".*

Interviewees in this project commented that they were aware that they often used words that the validation body liked to see used rather than what other people outside of higher education understood. On this note, the T-Sparc project noted that *"academic language used throughout the curriculum*

design and programme approval process can limit the effectiveness of employer engagement in the design process" (University of Birmingham T-Sparc 2009, section 4*).* Indeed one of their interviewees said, *"I do think there is a way that we can phrase things within the University which requires translation for anybody that's not used to HE"* (T-Sparc 2012b 'specialised language').

We have seen that much of the data from the interviewees concerned the writing of the module descriptor templates. The individual sections of the templates are set out in a particular order, and the document is constructively aligned. Thus staff within the university of focus are exposed to the concept of constructive alignment even if they have not studied or actively engaged with the concept. The following section considers this in its discussion of alignment.

6.3.5 Master Theme 5: Alignment

This master theme produced two sub-themes: 'the influence of curriculum design models', and 'programme considerations'. Twenty-six of the respondents who had experience of designing a new module used the module descriptor by starting at the beginning, and working their way through in the order of the template. As mentioned in Chapter 5, 15 people said that they started at a convenient point for them. One of the things that this project was interested in was whether or not staff adopted the design models that are widely promoted by educational theorists, and this is discussed next.

6.3.5.1 The influence of curriculum design models

When asked the following survey question:

> **Think of your most recent experience: when you are designing curricula do you use any of the following aids to help you? Tick up to 3 that are the most important to you**

27 respondents said that they used 'models of curriculum design. Twenty-three people stated that they had 'discussions with educational developers or learning technologists and six respondents used 'how-to-do-it' curriculum design books'. However, and as outlined in Chapter 5, when looking at the

differences in the percentages of these respondents who possessed a teaching qualification and those who did not, there were significant differences between the two groups when looking at the use of curriculum design models (32.8% for the first group compared to 14.8% for the second), and discussions with educational developers or learning technologists (25.9% compared to 14.8%). However, and in respect to the use of curriculum design books, there was little difference between the two groups.

The interviewees were not asked a specific question about 'models of design' as not all participants had a teaching qualification, and it was considered to be clumsy to interrupt the interview flow by having to explain the question. However, interviewees were asked the following question:

> ***'Think of a module that you have designed, reviewed or redesigned recently – how did you start the process?'***

Two of the interviewees mentioned specific design models or educational theorists in their answer, and all of the responses mentioned the point at which the assessment is considered. The latter was addressed in the section on 'Assessment' above. However, it was difficult to determine if curriculum design models do or do not influence module design practice. Whilst a good number of the survey respondents said that they were a useful aid in design, only a couple of interviewees mentioned them, and that was in passing. People do not necessarily know that what they are doing is rooted to a design model, and it has already been highlighted in the section on design documents (above) that constructive alignment has influenced institutional templates, without some people realising it.

But for all this it can be revealed that three interviewees stated that when designing modules they began the process by considering the learning outcomes first. For example, two interviewees said:

"... if I was starting a module from scratch first of all I would want to write the learning aims and outcomes ..." (T2,1,7)

"... I write my learning outcomes and I think about the syllabus really and what we're gonna actually include …" (T11,5,150)

Conversely though, three interviewees expressed that they had no structured way of designing a module. One person said:

"I mean I don't have a blueprint in my head, I'd more or less make it up again from scratch each time I'm presented with a situation and analyse it … I never enter with a pre-ordained plan for any module, I just try to get a feel for what we do, and try to think about how I can put it all together within the time constraint in the optimal way." (T6,2,46)

Nevertheless, the importance of learning outcomes and subject benchmarks was mentioned frequently throughout the course of the interviews. Understanding what the learning outcomes are, and getting them right, was an issue that some interviewees spoke freely about. This response was typical:

"Understanding what the subject benchmarks might be, the level benchmarks ... because from that for me, then you start to formulate what the learning outcomes are ... that's the kind of root to it ... and that's not easy sometimes to get those right ... I mean you don't want to go round in circles ... you know what I mean they take a bit of work don't they to get the learning outcomes right ... so getting those learning outcomes I think is quite an important part of the process ..." (T20,5,155).

This interviewee reflected the approach by Moon (2002, p.115) who uses an outcomes-based approach, whereby one needs to be clear about the type of learning that one expects from the students and what the learning outcomes are. Like the ethos promoted by Biggs and Tang, interviewees also suggested that teaching should be designed to meet these learning standards (2007, p.54). People tried very hard to achieve this part of the design process and admitted that they sometimes struggled with it, not only as an individual, but also as team. Likewise, the OULDI project (2012, p.7) found that half of the staff that they surveyed thought that it was hard to

understand how all the components (e.g. learning outcomes and assessment) of design fitted together. In this project, one interviewee stated that getting the learning outcomes correct was something that s/he was always trying to achieve, but as a team approach this did not have a history of success. She said:

"One of the hardest things I find when starting from scratch is to get the module outcomes fine. I find that the hardest. Both from a how broad and how deep do we need to go and the level outcomes that are appropriate in terms of the stage that the students are at and incorporate what's come before, and what's coming after, and I think that's where we've failed historically, not having enough knowledge or understanding of what's gone on or is coming ..." (T7,3,74).

The point at which the assessment is considered has already been discussed, and the above may have some relevance to these expressed

experiences. In this regard, Adelman (2015, p.17) suggests that *"In a way, the writing of learning outcome statements work backwards from assignments and prods that faculty present every day."* This suggests that being able to write good learning outcomes requires one to think about the learning activities, including assignments that students are being asked to do.

6.3.5.2 Programme considerations

Most questionnaire respondents (75) involved in module design said that they looked at other module descriptors within the programme to see if there was any duplication of curricula. Four people said that they didn't. Although interviewees were not asked about aligning their modules within a whole programme, the concept of aligning (or positioning) a module within a programme was something that was considered by a number of interviewees in their approach to design, review and redesign. One person said:

"... so if I've identified a need for the module to exist then that has to align with the programme learning outcomes ..." (T16,1,19).

Aligning modules to programmes and situating them in the wider curriculum provision was something that interviewees found easy to do and over three-quarters of them considered the wider context when designing or enhancing new modules. Positioning a module within a whole programme according to student needs was something that was also mentioned. One interviewee said:

"I think one of the things for me, if we are looking at a module level, actually is where does that module fit ... when I'm thinking about modules, it's about what the context of that module – because it's not about cramming everything into that module." (T20,1,8)

Some of the quotations used so far in this chapter have suggested that module designers take an individual approach to design. On the other hand, there is evidence that is more illustrative of a collaborative approach. The following two sections look at these two master themes, and their emerging sub-themes in more detail.

6.3.6 Master Theme 6: Working alone

One of the things that this project was interested in was whether or not the overall experience of module design and redesign was an individual one, a collective one, or was it a combination of the two?

None of the questionnaire survey questions referred to individual practice, but a number of interviewees indicated that they felt that their module design practice was an individual exercise, even although they thought that it should be, and they wanted it to be, a collective one. One person said:

"Well this might be naïve but I feel like when I'm given a module curricula to design I'm just left to get on with it ... what I can't believe is that we do it in such isolation (expresses amazement). We never all really come together and (pause) we don't seem to do that at all which I find a bit shocking. I try to mention it to people but I don't seem to get anywhere with it. It just seems to be a bit disjointed and it's kind of like by the luck of the god or goddess that

we don't completely go off tangent really ... It just seems to be so haphazard." (T3,6,188)

One person said that designing modules as an individual was something that s/he would like to be given more opportunity to do, and as s/he was employed on a temporary contract it would improve his/her chances or being re-employed.

"I like to be given the opportunity to do it – it makes me feel part of a team rather than just an hourly and it gives me some sort of self worth and a feeling that I'm doing okay at the job. I think the more I do – well I hope, the more likely I am going to be wanted to teach the next year". (T14,1,19)

Both of these responses were expressing how important the module design process is. However, the first interviewee viewed this from a pedagogic stance (this interviewee is tenured) and the second (by virtue of their contract) was taking a stance that was based more on self-interest. Incidentally, the second interviewee was asked if their response would be different if they were permanently employed, and the answer was 'yes'.

Two-thirds of the qualitative responses concerning this master theme stemmed from the following question, despite it not mentioning anything about individual or collective activity:

> ***'What are you trying to achieve in the process of designing or redesigning a module?'***

These responses produced two emerging themes: 'academic autonomy' and 'explanations for using an individual approach to design', and they are presented from the next sub-section. It will be seen that overall, the experiences of the interviewees were mixed, with some of them adopting an individual approach to design and redesign. Other interviewees felt that their individual design approach was more reliant upon their relationships with colleagues, and this was something that they valued.

We will also see that for this theme, over half of the interviewees stated that their experiences of module design and redesign alternated between individual and collective approaches depending on their levels of experience, the dynamics of the team, and their own personalities. This sits with Bamber et al.'s (2009) assertion that when people interact in the workplace, they can shape their own and other peoples identities, but they can also hold onto their own existing identities that were shaped in previous contexts.

6.3.6.1 Academic autonomy

A number of interviewees said that their approach alternated between a collective activity and an individual one. A third of people remarked that individual design gave them the autonomy that they wanted. The following quote was typical:

"When I've actually got a module to put the flesh on the bones so to speak, the bones are negotiated collectively, but then it is my responsibility to put the meat on it – then I do have some flexibility there." (T6,5,155)

Equally however, approximately another third of interviewees expressed, sometimes explicitly, that they no longer have autonomy for what and how they teach. Whether or not they ever did have independence is another question. Nevertheless, this is not a very recent phenomenon as Nixon (1996) observed that the role of the academic was no longer one that was automatically autonomous. One interpretation of the interview data is that three of the interviewees held a view of 'normal' academic practice which reflected their own historical ideas of academia, more than those of for the current situation.

The notion of academic autonomy and creativity is something that one might think would present itself in design practice, particularly when new curricula are being created or when existing curricula is undergoing review and change, not only at programme level but also at individual module level. In this project, academic autonomy was expressed as being a tool to be used positively, because it was a professionally validated module, or that it made

pedagogic sense. This was something that was mentioned by almost all of the interviewees.

But what did emerge from the interviews was a sense of 'individualism' within a collective activity, whereby academics 'stood their ground' so to speak. One interviewee said that they designed and redesigned modules within a collective team approach, but suggested that individual personalities were strong enough to override this collegiality if necessary. For example, one interviewee said:

"... generally speaking, if it's a module that I'm responsible for (laugh) well lets just say that I'm pretty much confident enough to argue my point". (T5,3,110)

This finding was picked up by the study by Mathieson (2012) in that *"while dominant trends could be identified in different work-groups, they did not always constitute a shared 'community of practice', and within work-groups opposing perspectives were articulated by individual academics ..."* (p.562). Coria et al. (2010) also found evidence of this in that they found that *"the evidence shows that universities faced problems when they attempted to implement changes to adjust curricula … due to individual and organisational resistance to change"* (p.247).

The notion of employing academic autonomy to do the right thing was a practice that was mentioned by almost all of the interviewees. One person explained that s/he wouldn't change their design approach if they felt that what they believed in was the right thing to do:

"I wouldn't want to perhaps cause as much as an argument as I would have done maybe two or three years ago but I would still stand up for … example the referencing thing ... I won't give up on that, I'll keep plugging away until somebody says – yeah – that's actually quite a good idea ..." (T1,3,105).

This sense of individual 'determinism' became apparent when interviewees were asked if their approach would be different if they were asked to design a

module within a very short timeframe:

"... I would want to know the reasons why we needed this change ... I'd want to know what the rationale was ... I'd have to say that I'd struggle with it, yeah, I'd struggle with it, unless I could see – they'd told me the rationale and yes I could see that makes sense, it's because of the curricula or because it's a professional body requirement, if it's a clear rationale I'd go ahead and do it, if not, then I'd take a bit of convincing (laugh)". (T2,1,26)

6.3.6.2 Explanations for using an individual approach to design

Bamber et al. (2009) suggest that one aspect of socio-cultural theory is that individual, group and institutional histories impact on the design process. Unless interviewees specifically mentioned whether or not their practice had been historically uniform, all of the interviewees were asked if their design approach was consistent or if it had changed overtime. Interviewees gave mixed responses, but the majority said that their approach had changed. Like the findings of Trowler (1998), Bamber et al. (2009) and Anderson (2011) this project also found evidence that about a quarter of interviewees approached module design from a historical perspective, and by using pre-existing values and attitudes in the way that they always had. Conversely, a small number of interviewees rejected what 'had always been done in the past', and others adapted their approaches according to the circumstances at the time. One person said:

" … It probably has changed overtime, yeah. I think I'm more focussed on clarifying what I want the learning outcomes to be before I start doing anything else than I probably was 5 or 6 years ago. I was probably more focussed on how are we going to teach this so yeah – I think it has changed". (T2,3,73)

Four interviewees actively decided against adopting an individual approach. A few people explained that they felt that they didn't have sufficient confidence in the design process, and that this impacted on their individual approach to module design. One person said:

"To be honest, I sometimes don't know where to start. I've only designed a module from scratch once, and I pulled on a lot from other people." (T14,2,57)

However, and with support from colleagues, levels of confidence can improve. One interviewee explained that s/he had requested collaborative design when s/he was less confident but it was not forthcoming. With increased experience, it was no longer a problem:

"... probably historically when I was less confident, competent, probably confidence – the relationship has been asking for help, and never not receiving it ... now, I've become the in-house expert on that topic." (T11,6,190)

Sometimes, an individual design approach was something that had evolved:

"I think it's evolved – for me certainly – obviously in the early years I think I tend to take the cues of what I was given – I was handed a module ... and the person who was teaching it before erm went through and understanding material, and you draw from past exam papers and you keep things going probably in the same vein for at least a couple of years … beyond that I think I've probably developed my own thoughts about how I think modules should be developed ..." (T15,1,25).

One person also explained that their experience of individual module design had been an instinctive one:

"On reflection now, with having a more formal experience, (it) was very instinct-driven. Probably influenced quite heavily through my observations of colleagues and speaking to colleagues about module design but not in any shape or form research backed ... that was instinct-driven rather than anything educationally-driven." (T7,1,20)

However, another person said that their approach was not instinctive, but was based on the comparison of other module paperwork:

“I'm not sure it's instinctive – I use existing module descriptors erm and I've looked at a lot of module descriptors – because I rewrote the whole degree last year … So in order for me to do that I had to look at lots and lots and lots of module descriptors and see what they offered ...” (T10,3,95).

One interviewee said that their individual approach was 'personality driven':

***“...** it is probably personality driven. So as my perspective as a learner, and as a teacher, and what feels right and what doesn't, that's based on feelings I've had ...”* (T7,2,57).

It is interesting that whilst these interviewees had completed the in-house PGCHE course (which included a module on curriculum design and the theories and models associated with it) they used their own initiatives to find their way round the design process.

Where interviewees were expressing that they practised a more individual design approach, ten of them felt that this was a result of the constraints that they were under, and that working alone manifested as a design coping strategy. We have already seen evidence of this via the design of the assessment, and writing module design documents in a loose fashion. Whether or not this was a reactive, temporary practice, or if it was more of an embedded practice was an interesting reflective question. Two interviewees said that:

“...how would I respond would depend on the constraints I was under ...” (T6,2,41).

As mentioned above, ten interviewees had developed individual coping design strategies regarding their expressed constraints. Louvel had noted that she observed actions that suggested that academics *“behave more or less strategically”* (2013, p.671). Taking design documents home over the weekend or whilst on annual leave was mentioned by three interviewees. This response was typical:

“I'd say I'm relatively disciplined in not taking things home but I am willing to relieve the pressure on Monday by doing that if I can feel the benefit. So I can justify to myself – well it is a conscious thought process if I do X, Y, Z this weekend, I can cope better with this.” (T7,4,137)

Other interviewees said that they prioritised what needed doing but that sometimes meant that not everything was done:

“... sometimes I just don't do things that I would like to do, that's the bottom line.” (T10,5,155)

It was not surprising that when participants were talking about their individual approaches, it was when they were talking about feeling under pressure. This is because the latter is an individual concept which, in my own experience, is felt more strongly when one is working on a task alone. In that respect, perhaps one way of relieving pressure might be to discuss the task with colleagues, perhaps gaining collegial support as a result, rather than soldiering on alone. As such, the master theme of collaborative practice is discussed next.

6.3.7 Master Theme 7: Working collaboratively

When asked about the aids (or tools) that respondents use to design curricula, five of the tick-box responses could be interpreted as being related to the suggested 'discourses' discussed by Bamber et al. (2009). These were 'discussions with departmental or school colleagues', 'discussions with educational developers or learning technologists', 'team meetings', 'workshops' and 'away days'. This was a multiple answer question, but the answer with the highest score was 'discussions with departmental or school colleagues'. 'Workshops' and 'away days' (these are team meetings that can last for at least half a day and sometimes take place away from the usual place of work) were the responses with the two lowest scores. However, whilst all these events are intended to promote some kind of group discussion, the latter two social practices are more formally planned events

whilst 'discussions with departmental or school colleagues' can be perceived to be less formal in nature.

When respondents were asked what influenced their practice of module design, the questionnaire survey data revealed that one's 'subject area' was clearly the most common answer, with 'subject pedagogy', 'your own experiences of higher education' and 'established team or school practice' being important in similar proportions. Once again, 'away days' were the least important factor.

Responses showed some consistency with socio-cultural perspectives on curriculum design. We have already seen that the three options with the most frequent occurrence were 'your subject area', 'your subject pedagogy' and 'your own experiences of higher education'. The answer with the next highest score was 'established practice within your own school or team'. These responses are akin to the individual and group practices, interactions, structures and identities mentioned by Bamber et al. (2009). The qualitative written comments included *"an awareness of good practice elsewhere in higher education"* and *"information that a module isn't working well".* A further three responses also related to socio-cultural theory in that they mentioned to personal histories and past experiences. These were: *"many years of teaching, and learning what works and what does not work, given my individual style", "past experience as a teacher and a trainer"* and *"previous employment in training design".*

Interviewees spoke about how their historical influences influenced their experiences of module design in the follow-up interviews too. For example, one person remarked that one important design factor for them was:

"I suppose thinking about historically designing modules, and modules I've designed in the past ..." (T23,1,24).

The data therefore indicated that collaborative staff practice can be influenced by retrospective histories as suggested by Bamber et al. (2009).

This master theme produced five emerging sub-themes: 'relationships with colleagues', 'the importance of collaboration', 'collaboration as an intentional approach', 'working collaboratively outside of the immediate team', and 'issues with a collaborative approach'. The first of these is discussed next.

6.3.7.1 Relationships with colleagues

The questionnaire survey question **'What influences your practice of module design?'** was influenced by socio-cultural theory. When responding to this question, staff stated that interactions between other university staff were also a design aid. These included *"discussion with colleagues from within the university and from other institutions"* and *"learning from others by sitting on XX* (internal validating body)*."*

To elicit information concerning collaborative experiences, interviewees were asked the following question:

> ***'How important are your professional and even social relationships with fellow academics, professionals, managers and /or students?'***

Three interviewees thought that good colleague relationships were important, but despite this they didn't always engage in them. A large number of interviewees spoke about the importance of their more immediate colleagues. One person remarked that:

"Relationships in the course team are absolutely vital … I spend a lot of time trying to foster those kinds of relationships – where we can talk it through …" (T12,4,125).

This response is akin to those given in the OULDI-JISC project, which found that 26 of the 37 respondents said that they would most prefer sharing their ideas, experiences and/or designs for learning with a specific, group or faculty, and nine said it would be with individuals that they know or meet (2009b, p.49).

A few interviewees mentioned the importance of having working relationships with institutional colleagues outside of the immediate team, and not surprisingly perhaps, interviewees who were involved with professionally validated courses valued colleagues with professional real world practice. However, four interviewees in this project mentioned that the effect that external employers and professional bodies had on their module design wasn't always straightforward.

For five interviewees, a collaborative approach to module design wasn't necessarily based on good relationships; it was seen to an unavoidable phenomenon of curriculum design and redesign, although such relationships were not always happy ones. One interviewee said:

"It's collaborative in the sense that the modules will have to sit in the programme suite, so the modules will have to be appropriate alongside all the other modules in the programme ... so it's not just the gift of one person to look at changes to the modules and I do think that's important."
(T23,4.120)

6.3.7.2 The importance of collaboration

Like the interviewees in the project by Louvel (2013) and the teams studied by Burrell et al. (2015), almost all of the interviewees in this research valued their relationships with colleagues, external examiners, practitioners and managers, and over half of them said that they made great efforts to foster such relationships. Two participants in the study by Burrell et al. (2015) explained that working in a team fosters collective rewards, and that members can learn from one another.

In the study for this thesis, one interviewee felt that when designing modules his/her relationship with fellow colleagues was so important that, interestingly, s/he didn't actually feel able to speak his /her mind:

"*Well you know – they're very important, important in the way that erm I know what limitations I've got if you like, in how far I can argue a point and I won't hesitate to stand up for what I think is right, however, based on the fact*

that I know what politically goes on in the background and how tenuous the whole situation is, I wouldn't rock the boat too much ..." (T1,3,98).

Another interviewee thought that good colleague relationships were important, but that they didn't always engage in them. This person said:

***"**I like to get on with people – that is important to me. I don't really get involved with the design side in a big way so when I tweak module descriptors I tend to do it mostly on my own usually at home but I do always check with the programme director or departmental administrator to make sure everything is okay. If students make suggestions or ask if an assessment can be changed for example I usually pass the comments on ..."* (T14,2,59).

About 60% of the interviewees in this study spoke about the importance of their more immediate colleagues and how they valued a close working relationship with them when designing and enhancing modules (and programmes). The following response was typical:

***"...** when I first started it was very isolated, we had separate offices – we had different buildings … we met maybe once every couple of months – nobody really cared if things were aligned or not it was only when we were cherry picking modules from the module catalogue to add to options or other things that it became an issue – now we all work in the same office and have done for the last year and a half, there is definitely a much closer relationship between the course tutors when they put they're modules together …"* (T16,7,214).

It was felt that relationships with colleagues were especially important when one is co-teaching a module:

"... we came from quite different traditions ... So when we're co-teaching those modules, which in some years we have done, it is a sort of a little bit of negotiation ... we just actually try to be explicit about the fact that we have different positions ... but you have to be explicit about it, if you're not explicit about it, they just get confused." (T13,6,193)

This was also the case if someone didn't feel sufficiently experienced. Two interviewees explained:

"*With colleagues, well erm, well I feel that I rely on colleagues, cos colleagues here have got more experience than me, so I rely on them to run things past them, to check things out with them. They've usually got something that they can help me with or give me some advice on, so that's really important."* (T3,5,173)

"I like to feel that there are people around me whose advice I can seek. Definitely no man is an island and all that stuff." (T1,4,114)

Generally, interviewees welcomed the collaborative efforts of their colleagues, and appreciated the advice and help offered or given. Most of this was informal in nature, and the next section discusses instances where collaboration is used as a design approach.

6.3.7.3 Collaboration as an intentional approach

The idea of social networks, social interaction and knowledge communication has been explored in the literature review, but it is worth repeating Bamber et al.'s idea that *"people within universities, departments and work groups interact, and in so doing develop a particular set of meanings about the world they are dealing with"* (2009, p9), and Wenger's (1998) ideas concerning *"relationships of mutuality – the foundation stones of a 'community of practice' whereby people learn to collaborate, share ideas and find solutions to common problems"* (cited in Winter 2009, 128).

We have already seen that these assertions were particularly noticeable where modules were co-taught by two or more lecturers with different backgrounds, or where a module was provided on more than one degree programme. Interviewees took the opportunity to share their design ideas and the suggestions made by Christakis and Fowler (2010) and Becher and Trowler (2001) on social interaction were largely evident, although as suggested in section 6.3.7.2 above, two interviewees shied away from such interaction for fear of rocking the boat.

For about a quarter of interviewees, a collaborative approach was unavoidable:

"… I guess collegiate in the sense that we try to ensure that something like assessments are varied across that the programme so I wouldn't willy nilly change a module without speaking with other people ..." (T23,4.120).

One interviewee elaborated on this idea and said that for the team that s/he was working within, collaborative module design was a deliberate approach:

"…we've moved away from this model where modules are developed by individuals – we don't have individuals working their own modules and working entirely independently. We have very few modules that are taught by a single member of staff." (T6,3,103)

6.3.7.4 Working collaboratively outside of the immediate team

A few interviewees mentioned the importance of having effective working relationships, which are often based on negotiation with institutional colleagues outside of the immediate team. This extract is a good example of what was said:

"If I were redesigning one (a module) *then I would obviously seek the views of the programme management committee and erm get their input as well ...what they want as well as what the students on the course want ... if there were any other key stakeholders, then we would take their views into account as well … I think that they (relationships) are very important because I think you can make suggestions and make initial drafts in isolation, but I think you should always get input from other people, usually colleagues, sometimes students on a postgrad course and sometimes the LTA Dean give input if you plan to do something that radically different … I've been in the situation where module team leaders have differences of opinion and we've talked through and come to a consensus where we all reasonably comfortable with, rather than a direct conflict ..."* (T2,2,48).

Not surprisingly perhaps, interviewees who were involved with professionally validated courses valued colleagues with professional real world practice:

" … I think that on a professional course like XX it's important to have that er cohort of staff who do have current or recent practice that's in the real world." (T2,3,103)

Four interviewees mentioned that the effect that external employers and professional bodies had on their module design wasn't always straightforward because there was sometimes a mismatch between what external stakeholders suggested or wanted, and what could be delivered internally.

"... they (professional bodies) identify certain modules that should include more of an aspect or less of something else – you know make suggestions ... so you know it's kind of another aspect, another facet really to how you would then re-design modules – it's either spot the problems yourself and rectify them which is generally easier or being told what to do externally – quite often you can't understand or align with their thinking – and just disagree." (T15,3,75)

"... each year I have a meeting with practitioners and managers at a local XX (professional place) to find out if what we're delivering is – well – I suppose whether we're teaching students what they will need to know when they're out there in practice – and what I found is that managers sometimes want different things from the practitioners ..." (t.10,5,137).

In the University of Birmingham's T-Sparc project (Blog 2012b – Stakeholders) *"staff identified a wide range of stakeholders in the curriculum design process but there is evidence of a wide variance in the degree to which these stakeholders have the opportunity to input into the curriculum design process"*. Three interviewees in this project mentioned that it was sometimes hard to understand what they wanted and therefore it was easier to deal with any issues in-house.

6.3.7.5 Issues with a collaborative approach

Two interviewees made it quite clear that whilst they engaged in collegial in-house collaborative design, any discussions were often on their pro-activity rather than that of their colleague(s):

"I'm conscious of colleagues who either cannot, or will not, make that time to make those adjustments and I think it's a 50/50 split probably … but it's been on my pro-activity – not the other way around." (T7,4,109)

One interviewee gave their reason for this situation:

"... I think especially in a small department that can be really difficult because people are working with slightly different time-frames and they're prioritising differently." (T13,6,216)

Three interviewees mentioned problems that they encountered where they did not have a harmonious collaborative relationship. One interviewee said:

"I think if I totally went and did my module on my own, it may not fit with the programme – the programme leader is very … he sees it as his baby ... he's got a very strong sense of ownership of it, so quite often there's a … robust discussion, shall we say about any changes we want to make and we have our meetings where people talk and talk and talk and ended up back nowhere, you know and I think what I find frustrating is that the rest of us are in agreement and he's not, so it's a bit difficult ..." (T5,2,36).

This was an example of where interviewees did not always find such collaboration helpful, as some colleagues could be protective of their curricula.

This spilled into another issue that was raised by four interviewees, which was where there was an expressed lack of agreement. In the University of Birmingham's T-Sparc study (2012b, T-Sparc Blog – (Co-ordination) one interviewee said, *"if you've got 12 or 14 people, they'll be 12 or 14 different versions of what they think the ideal structure is"*. Likewise, the study by

Burrell et al (2015) found some resistance within teams where members were of differing ages and backgrounds.

One person in this study said:

" … this module design is in danger I think of being slightly diluted by having too many chiefs wanting to have their programme learning outcomes reflected in some way in a single module … ". (T16,7,232)

Overall, however, the general impression from the interviews was that the module design and redesign experiences of interviewees were mainly collaborative, and even where they weren't, people wanted them to be as experiences of design were often more positive when they developed through team relationships (Beetham 2009, section C).

We have seen from the extracts above, and in the previous chapter, that a few interviewees said that they would welcome the opportunity to talk to others about module design. Indeed in her report, Beetham (ibid, section C) further noted that *"Some staff feel that they are sometimes designing curricula in isolation and would appreciate more opportunity to work with other teams in their department or allied subject areas".*

Some of the responses cited within this chapter have either explicitly mentioned or have touched on the issue of institutional support for module (and indeed curriculum) design. One way in which people gain the opportunity to talk to others about design is via in-house or external training courses concerning module and curriculum development. Thus the next (and last) theme (and its emerging sub-themes) looks at the role of teaching qualifications in module design.

6.3.8 Master Theme 8: Teaching guidance and qualifications

Fifty-eight of the survey respondents possessed teaching or teaching-related qualifications which included some level of training or teaching guidance about curriculum design.

When they were asked what influences their practice of module design, 43 survey respondents said that professional courses such as the in-house training programme (a type of Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education) were important (see table 7 in Chapter 5). A similar number (41) stated that in-house training seminars and/or workshops were influential.

In the subsequent qualitative interviews, interviewees were asked the following question:

> ***'If you have a teaching qualification that incorporates elements of curriculum design, does it help you in your practice?'***

About a quarter of the interviewees did not possess a qualification, and therefore did not elaborate further but the remainder answered the question, and the data from this question resulted in three emergent sub-themes: 'engaging with the educational literature and theories', 'personal benefits' and 'institutional direction'.

The university used in this study offers all staff the opportunity to enrol on a HEA validated course (it is mandatory for new academics and is the PGCHE as mentioned above), but some interviewees said that they held other teaching qualifications. These included Certificates in Education, in-house training and qualifications designed for Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA's). A few participants acquired their qualifications before starting work at the University.

6.3.8.1 Engaging with educational literature and theories

None of the JISC research projects specifically addressed the influence of teaching qualifications on one's experience of module design.

In this study, it transpired that the experience of participating in (and eventually graduating from) a teaching qualification affected interviewees' experience of module design in some way. Like the interviewees in the study by Roberts (2015) this was mainly to have a positive effect, particularly when

it introduced staff to educational theories. Two interviewees remarked that:

"It's made me more aware of the theoretical basis of module design and course design, mmm so I can pull on that when I'm doing things and approach things in a more robust or logical way." (T2,2,63)

"… it has been, as a new lecturer, for someone to go through module design with you at quite an early stage, has been useful. … In terms of curriculum design, as I said I had no real theory ... I had no real theory of education and education theories before I started doing it ... it does help if you - in terms of we've covered curriculum alignment – that things should link up and actually they've made sense ..." (T8,7,233).

In this study, a number interviewees (like the one above) said that without doing the course they would not have been aware of educational theory and/or the educational literature. Five interviewees also said that it signposted the relevant educational literature for them, particularly when people were previously unaware of its existence, or when they were going through a phase of modular and curricular review. One person remarked that:

" … it did kind of help that I was doing the XX module (an in-house training course) *alongside … cos the educational literature and databases and everything are completely different to the XX ones ..."* (T11,5,144).

6.3.8.2 Personal benefits

In addition, the study by Norton et al. (2010) examined participants' views about their in-house course. They found that *"there was a general consensus that the programme offered insights that were of value ... These included the areas of teaching and learning, what happens in other Schools/Departments, the usefulness of teaching and learning theories" (ibid. p.353).* However, they also found that only six of the interviewees *"felt that they were able to apply what they had learned on the programme into practice." (ibid. p.353).* This finding echoed the study by Fanghanel (2004). However, and like the research study by Roberts (2015) this project found the opposite view as almost two-thirds of the questionnaire respondents who possessed a

qualification said that professional courses influenced their module design. Interviewees who expressed that they were most appreciative of the course were those who were going through some kind of module or curricula review at that time, or those who re-evaluated the way the way they were already working. One person said:

"Yeah, it was, with hindsight the perfect time to have done it because we were physically going through it (a curriculum overhaul), and I don't think that I would have gained the same out of it had I not actually been going through it. But one thing that has absolutely transformed me, and I've used it in different things lots and lots and lots is the confidence and ability to engage with the literature. That wasn't on my radar before." (T7,5,148)

Three interviewees remarked that the teaching qualifications also enabled them to learn the language and rituals within higher education:

"... it's introduction into the community ... yeah this is how we do things round here, this is how we're taught – this is how we behave as a teacher – and as you know – these are the words that you need to bandy around if you are going to be seen to be a higher education teacher, so was it useful? Yes – because it forced me to use the textbooks that are shaping the way that education is managed. So yes in that sense, yes it was very, very useful yeah. It forced me to learn the language and learn the rituals (laugh)*"*. (T17,3,70)

"... that prepared me well for knowing the language around – constructive alignment, learning outcomes, schemes of work – those things made sense to me, so yeah, doing that training really helped me in terms of being able to design it". (T19,3,93)

Nevertheless, not everyone held such positive views. For example, new appointees didn't always agree with the required contractual attendance on the course. One interviewee expressed that:

"… because I had so much teaching … think I had more teaching than would normally be the case I kind of felt I was quite experienced in that quite a lot of

things they were talking about I actually know about so I think the content was very good – I'm sure it was very useful for people who really have no experience whatsoever but I thought to myself, you know, sometimes that I don't need to be here ..." (T9,4,122)

This issue emerged in Norton et al.'s study (2010) where participants *"… valued the experience of taking the in-house course and thought that the benefits outweighed any disadvantages although workload and demands on their time were real concerns"* (p.354).

A few interviewees remarked that doing an in-house teaching qualification was not always helpful. Two people said:

"*I suppose my experience of colleagues doing the qualification, both at my prior institution and here, I remain to be convinced of the worth of it ... in terms of feedback from people who have done it, who eventually see it as being <u>another</u> thing that they have to go through in their first year of teaching, and that's problematic".* (T23,3,85)

"*I found the stuff about module design interesting, but certainly at that point far removed from reality. I had really, really mixed feelings about it at the time – does that mean that everything I've been doing is actually just really rubbish? ... It just felt quite far removed from what actually happens in practice".* (T13,5,157)

On a more positive note, doing a teaching qualification made three other interviewees re-think the ways that they had been working:

"Well it actually made me think about it, I had to read about it, I had to do an essay on it ... I absolutely was really resistant to writing about formative assignments. Essentially for me if I write that it's important that means I have to do it … Now, they can't have a semester without a formative assessment! (Laugh) ..." (T3,4,136)

This statement was interesting because it contradicted the work by Nicol (2012) which suggests that *"… most academics are not knowledgeable about*

the research on teaching and learning in higher education (which is a discipline in itself); and even if they have studied the published literature they may have very little experience in translating educational ideas into actionable learning design plans in their discipline" (Nicol 2012, p.7).

For one interviewee, the change in their design practice came about because the course made that member of staff realise what it felt like to be a student:

"... an interesting spin-off is that you are actually a student sometimes and you see things from a student's point of view and your clarity on what you are expected to achieve, what you are supposed to be doing, and what you want to achieve, what you get marked against – so those kinds of things actually take a reflective look at those, and I've found myself criticizing colleagues for their coursework briefs etc and suggesting changes … so it has been helpful in terms of a kind of reflective approach I suppose to teaching generally, and in that particular case to designing modules." (T15,4,132)

This interviewee raised an important issue in that their participation on the teaching course resulted in more benefits than simply being 'educated about education'. This sentiment was echoed by other interviewees:

" ... because of the class situation I get to hear what other people are doing and the ideas from them. The people that we've met, the contacts like X and X – we're friends now and we would never have got to meet each other if it hadn't had been for that course and we've done favours for each other that we'd never had got to do if it hadn't been for that course." (T3,4,142)

The above comments are further illustrated by the case study of academics in a South African university executed by Du Toit (2012, p.1230). He concluded that *"... colleagues do implement the principles of the theories they engaged with during the PGCHE in their respective practices, and secondly, my colleagues do sustain the construction of new knowledge in higher education theory more often than not, through a collaborative effort".* In this study, a number of interviewees remarked that they enjoyed discussing module design with colleagues whilst on the course, particularly those who

shared similar issues and approaches to design, and one interviewee valued the opportunity it gave him/her to forge alliances. However, and as highlighted above, one interviewee said that the course was far removed from what was happening in the real world. These comments are an illustration of how people interact at work, which helps to shape the identity of both themselves and others around them (Bamber et al. 2009). They also reflect the observations made by Mathieson 2012 in which shared values and approaches in engaging and developing curricula were found.

6.3.8.3 Institutional direction

Four of the interviewees either explicitly suggested, or touched on the issue of institutional guidance being made available for module (and curriculum) design despite the existence of the PGCHE. They said that they would welcome accessible and visible institutional guidance, perhaps via an internal website, or in the form of a written guide. Indeed the University of Ulster's 'Viewpoints' project observed that, *"within higher education, there is an absence of guidance materials or formal structures or processes to support such design activities"* (cited in Nicol 2012, p.7). In addition, the University of Birmingham's T-Sparc Blog (2012b, 'Availability of Information') noted that their participants felt that *"It was certainly very hard to find and it wasn't in one particular place".*

However, the desire for support was also raised in the interviews executed by Cross et al. (2008) at the Open University in that *"... one respondent suggested that 'actually having the opportunity to talk to somebody might cut through a lot of digging around on websites to find whether there is anything there you want and then understanding it."* (2008, p.100)

Whilst we have seen that a number of the interviewees felt positive about discussing module and curriculum design with fellow colleagues, a number of the interviewees in this project also mentioned that, despite the existence of the PGCHE training course, they would like to see some kind of institutional support or written guidance for module design (rather than programme design) put into place. This response was typical:

"I suppose that some help or a guide or something – it would have been useful to have some kind of 'this is how you do it' ... That sort of guide would be useful – erm – because I felt like I was having to go and hassle people and you know it wasn't in their job description to tell me how to do a module." (T11,5,179)

The interviewee touched on the reticence that four interviewees felt about bothering their colleagues, although they did ask for support and help, and this links back to the section concerning the relationships between staff. Clearly the issue of support for module design was considered to be an institutional matter rather than one for colleagues. Despite this, one participant suggested that it was only by making errors and learning through your colleagues that the principles of module design could be got to grips with, even if written guidance was necessary. S/he said:

"I think that generally speaking, there isn't a lot of support for module design as such erm. I think doing the PGCHE is kind of the thing that may help you get to grips with module design, but I think you can learn by doing and learn by mistakes and by talking to colleagues, it's very much a kind of … on the job..." (T15,6,187)

Clearly there were conflicting views amongst the interviewees, depending on their personal experience, but certainly there was an overriding sense that many interviewees were actively and consciously navigating their way through what they frequently expressed as restrictive institutional practice**.**

6.4 Conclusion of the qualitative data

Generally, and despite which theme was being examined, individual responses tended to replicate those of the other published survey respondents and interviewees, irrespective of discipline, experience and the role that the participant played in the university. However, there were some contradictory responses and these have been highlighted in the discussion.

All of the master themes helped to address the main research question and a number of individual master themes were used to address the sub-research questions, depending of their relevance to the question.

Having presented the results and analysis of the emergent survey and interview data, the next, and final, chapter returns to the research questions in the light of the master and emerging sub-themes, the existing literature and previous published projects, and also the philosophical underpinnings used in this research.

Chapter 7: The Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This study set out to research the module design experiences of staff at one UK university. The aim of the research was to explore what their reported influences of module design and redesign were, with a particular focus on the role that contemporary theoretical models play, and at which stage of the process module designers consider the assessment task. The research was executed during a continuing period of social and economic change in higher education, and at a time when higher education staff are designing and enhancing modules for a changing student population. Despite there being published literature on curriculum design practice, and particularly around programme design, I was interested in what people told me (via their personal experiences) about how they designed and redesigned their *modules* and why they did it that way.

The data tended to lie with previously published works, but there were some contradictory findings, and this suggests that the during the intervening period between the time that the previous studies were executed, and the time at which this one was carried out, little appears to have changed.

Both sources of data were rich, were in substantial quantities, and produced data that more than adequately answered the research questions. The empirical findings associated with the research questions are presented in section 7.2.

Eight master themes were used to analyse the data, and the discussion of them (see Chapter 6) revealed a number of useful insights into the experiences of module design. For example:

- The more that the module descriptor template was seen to be an institutional definitive statement of design, the looser academics wrote it

- Some staff suggested that, in their experience, programmes (and the modules within them) seemed to be held together more by luck rather than design
- Module design and redesign is more situation-informed rather than evidence-informed
- Staff took into account the educational backgrounds of students and the changing context of higher education and their workloads when thinking about the assessment.

Whilst a small number of previous studies (see Chapter 3) had employed what researchers termed as initial base-lining surveys (these were designed to throw some light on the process of design) it was not implicitly clear through their reports and published findings if they had employed any theoretical considerations. Thus the theoretical contribution of this research, or its theoretical newness, was that it set out to discover if socio-cultural theory could explain any of the resulting accounts of module design and redesign experiences. It also sought to discover how closely the findings of the e-questionnaire and the subsequent semi-structured interviews mirrored other studies and published works concerning design practice within higher education.

The purpose of this study was to answer the following research question:

> ***What influences and drives academics when they are designing and redesigning modules?***

In addition, there were three sub-questions concerning approaches to module design, the relationship between contemporary design models and module design, and the consideration of the assessment in the design and redesign process.

1. ***Is the experience of module design and redesign an individual practice or is it more of a collaborative one?***

2. ***What is the relationship between contemporary design models and module design and how much impact do they have on the process?***

3. ***At what stage of the design process do academics and module leaders consider the assessment task for their modules (compared to the teachings of educational developers and theorists) and what factors influence this?***

Overall, the data from this study addressed all of the research questions, and the resulting empirical findings are discussed next.

7.2 The empirical findings

The main empirical findings were summarized in Chapter 6 (The Discussion of the Qualitative Data). In order to conclude the overall essence of the design and redesign experience, this section combines those empirical findings so as to answer the research question and sub-questions, by providing evidence and a synthesis of arguments presented in the main body. This will be executed by including a brief summary of the main findings already evidenced in Chapter 6.

Addressing the main research question:

> **What influences and drives academics when they are designing and redesigning modules?**

There were four main influences (or drivers) of design. These were either evident as a master theme in their own right or they manifested themselves as an emerging sub-theme within a master theme. Like the master themes, they do not evidence what all academics say, but they do all represent a large proportion (or community) of the interviewees and respondents. The four main influences were as follows:

1. Students

Having been informed by the works of Norton et al. (2010), Anderson (2011) and the T-Sparc project (2009) concerning responsibilities concerning student success, the changing student profile and being able to give students the required skills for the work place, it was not surprising that doing what both the survey participants and interviewees thought was the best for students influenced not only the module content, but also the writing of associated written documents. Almost every interviewee mentioned how student needs, their prior and existing skills, student progression and the student journey (for both undergraduates and postgraduates) and student feedback impacted on their experiences of design, review and redesign.

The concepts around cognitive dissonance were more centred on the issue of the changing student profile. What shone through was the amount of time that people took to address this social change (despite expressing that they were time starved), and that interviewees persevered with this approach because they saw it as necessary and worthwhile.

If it was felt that students could not absorb information or write very well, interviewees overwhelmingly found a different way to navigate this. But wanting to do the best for people is a complex matter, because it does not always equate with actually doing the best thing, and this is partly because best intentions do not always equal best practice. Three interviewees talked like altruistic teachers and were not working in an evidenced-informed way. Nearly half the interviewees spoke about how they wanted to inspire students through the curriculum by making the module and/or the assessment interesting and fun. Two interviewees said that this approach had backfired as negative student feedback had been received despite those students achieving high marks. About a third of the interviewees said that they either worried about feedback when tweaking modules or they had realised that that they simply could not please everyone. There were also varied responses when interviewees spoke about whether or not they consulted students when designing and enhancing modules. Indeed the participants in

this project had mixed feelings about the usefulness of student involvement in the design process.

2. Constraints

All of the interviewees and many of the questionnaire respondents revealed the effect of constraints on their experiences of module design and redesign. As mentioned in section 6.3.1, these were what participants felt were constraints. These often directly impinged upon or influenced module content, teaching methods and, in many cases, the choice of assessment. They manifested themselves as fire-fighting strategies that were used to influence the design of a module at that point in time. Even when a constraint was anticipated (perhaps because it was an on-going issue such as a module that attracted a very large number of students) perennial strategies and coping mechanisms were adopted such as working at weekends or whilst on annual leave, rather than making positive changes to the design (such as employing on-line assessments that were automatically marked by a computer package).

Throughout the interviews, illustrative examples of experienced constraints were raised by the participants. Like the findings of Kinman (1998), Anderson et al. (2011), Fearon (2008), Beetham (2009) and Cross et al. (2008) almost all of the personal accounts centred on time (or the perceived lack of it), a lack of resources, large class sizes, increasing student needs, having to teach modules for which interviewees had what they deemed to be inadequate subject knowledge, not being able to design or teach a module associated with their research or expert knowledge (Becher and Trowler 2001), and the institutional module approval (or validation) process (Goos and Hughes 2010).

These had a number of effects on the experiences of design as recalled by the interviewees. For example a number of staff spoke about how such constraints were, in their view, negatively affecting the quality of their modules and/or the paperwork associated with them. However, there were examples of more positive approaches to design. For example, almost all of

the respondents mentioned they wrote module descriptors vaguely to enable flexibility in delivery and the future evolution of the module.

About a quarter of the interviewees expressed that there were tensions around being given modules which concern subjects in which they do not specialise, and these views pretty much concurred with Ramsden's (1998) views on academic identity. Even when they were teaching these modules, there was evidence that participants felt that module design and review was restricted by an inability to be able to do what they would like to do. This was not always because members of staff were taking on modules for which they had no subject knowledge but also as a result of the changing social and economic climate with higher education. This sat with Albert and Whetto's (1985) assertions that *"Traditional academic values of 'professional autonomy and collective ideals are squeezed out and marginalised in favour of a managerial identity that 'is governed by values of economic rationality, the primacy of profit, and the minimisation of cost'* (pp.281-282, cited in Winter 2009, p.123). Rather than an institution incurring the cost of a specialist academic for every subject, it is standard practice for teaching staff to take on modules which are not within their specialisms.

However, three interviewees expressed that the constraints mentioned encouraged creativity. These people used their situation to inspire change in new methods of assessment and delivery of a module.

3. Institutional processes

This driver of module design was particularly evidenced around the drafting and completion of documents and the module approval/validation process. In essence, the interviewees gave the impression that considerable thought was given to writing documents either for a particular audience, a range of audiences, or more commonly for the approval panel. The latter was most likely to be seen by the interviewees as a bureaucratic process which heavily influenced the way that documentation was written, and this was something that took time from the actual design process. Documents were also carefully constructed with students in mind but, as mentioned briefly above, one of the

most influential factors upon module design was people's experience of writing the institutional design documents. To avoid the constraints of module design, academics have adopted a strategy whereby they complete the sections of the module descriptor by writing more loosely. There is a relationship between two things: the more detail that is required by the module descriptor - the more that academics have tried to resist prescription. What came across was that the more that a module descriptor, which is an institutionally designed document, was seen as a definitive statement of learner experience, the looser academics want to write it. Thus, if institutions are developing a tool to scaffold what we give students, in some ways it is having the opposite effect and this is a significant insight. This hasn't been interpreted as a 'them and us situation', but from this the view is that there is a mismatch between both parties of what a descriptor is intended to do. Both staff and the institution use it as a module road map, but this research has shown that for staff it is more about what isn't stated in the descriptor (by writing loosely) that sustainably gives the module various directions in which it can go.

With reference to the interviewees' experiences concerning institutional processes that have a negative effect on module design and review, all of the responses concerned the timing of completing the paperwork and the deadlines by which one needed to submit it. Some of the comments were accurate, but others concerned institutional deadlines that interviewees thought were inflexible, but this was not always true. Why there was a mismatch between the perception of some deadlines and the reality of the situation is not known.

4. Teaching qualifications

Like the three main drivers above, this also produced a large amount of data. Whilst not all interviewees held a teaching qualification, responses to the usefulness of this attribute, particularly the in-house PGCHE were mixed. Questionnaire respondents with a teaching qualification were more likely to use models of curriculum design and discussions with educational

developers to inform them. Nearly all of the interviews with a qualification suggested that it influenced their practice as their experiences of studying for that qualification helped to introduce them to educational theories, educational literature, and the languages and rituals that are specific to the academic community. One person said that the experience reminded them of what it felt like to be a student. However, another interviewee felt that the course initially reduced his/her level of confidence (regarding the design process) as a consequence of revealing just how much they did not know. Three interviewees also expressed that they did not like being forced to do the course (it is a contractual requirement that new lecturing staff and/or probationers complete it). Nearly all of the interviewees who were more established in their careers, and who had not had to undertake obligatory training provided for new academics, said that they were against this mandatory practice as they felt that the contractual obligation was just giving colleagues something else to do in addition to everything else.

Nevertheless, about a quarter of the interviewees in this study mentioned that despite there being an in-house PGCHE training course, they would like the University to offer some kind of institutional support or written guidance for module design that staff could tap into, perhaps via a design handbook or the internal website.

Addressing the first research sub-question:

> **Is the experience of module design and redesign an individual practice or is it more of a collaborative one?**

The questionnaire and interview responses suggested that there was a mix of individual and collaborative approaches, with the majority of interviewees using both. Interviewees who individually designed their modules expressed a desire for a more collaborative approach, especially if they lacked confidence.

The people who worked collaboratively expressed that, in their view, this was how module design and redesign should be done, and that institutional

support (which is not the same as collaboration) for curriculum design and review was desirable, even although there were at least 20 quotations that illustrated how much academics value and want to protect their own academic autonomy. By this they meant that they would do what they thought was right (a sense of professional responsibility to themselves if you like) and would either resist making changes to their design approach, or would plug away at an idea or change that they would like to introduce, until it was taken on board by other colleagues or the institution itself.

In line with previous studies, collaborative approaches to module design were seen to be beneficial and important, especially for those who were inexperienced, or new to the job. Good, working relationships with staff outside of the immediate team were valued and, not surprisingly, interviewees who had stated that they were involved in professional vocational degree programmes placed a heavy emphasis on the importance of collaborating with professional colleagues still working in practice. However, relationships with professionals weren't always straightforward because there could be tensions around the expectations that professionals had of the course and the modules within it.

Interviewees not only collaborated with their immediate colleagues but also with other institutional personnel, external bodies, future employers, external academic networks and students. Five interviewees expressed that collaboration was a necessary part of the design process because of the alignment required between modules for programme specifications.

However, experiences of collaborative design weren't always optimal. For example, one interviewee felt that in his/her experience, collaboration was not naturally forthcoming and had to be encouraged. Three interviewees explicitly spoke about programmes (and the modules within them) being held together more by luck rather than by actual programme design because, like a third of the interviewees, module design and review was an individual exercise. This is an interesting discovery, which bore out my own experiences and observations of module design and review, and further

research could investigate what is it about the system of higher education and/or its culture which leads people into an individual approach to module design. Whilst Bamber et al. (2009) acknowledge that a trait of socio-cultural theory is that both individual and group histories and practice impact on the design and review process, having thought about it, is there a blindness within social practice theory in that people will structure their work practices individually, even when seen to be working collaboratively within a team or work-group?

Although in-house training courses impacted on the way that people thought about design (usually by directing them to the appropriate educational literature) and in some cases allowed collaborative relationships to foster, three interviewees believed their experiences of module design and review to be based on instinct or their own individual personalities.

Addressing the second sub-research question:

> **What is the relationship between contemporary design models and module design and how much impact do they have on the process?**

From the total survey population just over a third of respondents said that they used design models to aid design. Curriculum design models were not discussed by the interviewees, even when prompted by the interviewer or when the interviewees were talking about their experiences of attending the University's in-house training course (PGCHE). In fact, only two people mentioned constructive alignment (which is an approach, rather than a model) and that was briefly in passing. It is not known why this was the case. Perhaps the vast majority of interviewees consisted of the questionnaire respondents who did not use design models. However, from my own experience I have observed that models do not figure in the everyday discourse of most academics. There is an artificial divide between models/education theory and the practice of academics. In her book Toohey (1999) mentions that academics inherit a module and then change it piecemeal. However, this does not mean that their practice of design isn't

informed by the models. For example the institutional module descriptor used in the university of focus is constructively aligned, but some academics will be unaware of this.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of participants in this research did not express that they used models when designing modules, even when they have been exposed to them as evidence-informed practice in training courses. On the other hand, nobody spoke about design models adversely or suggested that they were irrelevant in practice. One thought is whether or not we might expect people to use them. What the data points to is that the practice of module design and review is more situation-informed. In the university of study, academics are driven and influenced by other things, and these impact much more on the everyday practice of design than the models themselves. According to the experiences of module design expressed in this project, there are not even any iterative approaches to using the educational literature. Rather, there are more pragmatic concerns which are outweighing evidence-informed approaches, and this is an important observation. Institutionally, the university of focus and the sector as a whole is striving towards evidenced-based approaches, but at the moment what we can see from this research is that it isn't conducive, as there are more pragmatic approaches in play, and educational terminology is not evident in the more general discourses.

Addressing the third research sub-question:

> **At what stage of the design process do academics and module leaders consider the assessment task for their modules (compared to the teachings of educational developers and theorists) and what factors influence this?**

For a reasonable number of interviewees in this study, the experience of designing or re-designing the assessment is an aforethought, although this was not the dominant approach for the survey respondents. Two-thirds of interviewees (see section 6.3.2.1) and 17 of the survey respondents (see section 5.4.3) said that the mode of assessment was the first part of module

design process that they looked at. There were a number of reasons why people said this, including the fact that the type of assessment influenced the way that they taught the module, the assessment was used to evidence the content of the module and so that the learning outcomes could be designed around it. What is important is why participants took this approach, and this is discussed in the next paragraph. However, three interviewees said, as suggested by some design models and curriculum theorists, that they thought about the assessment after writing the learning outcomes and that getting the outcomes right was important to them even when it wasn't always achievable. Two-thirds (62) of survey respondents said that they took a more iterative approach which is typical of Shaw and Jacksons' (2002) model.

There was evidence that the point at which someone considered or designed the mode of assessment was influenced by more pragmatic reasons which outweighed the more evidence-informed educational literature. Indeed one of the drivers regarding the design of the assessment also linked into expressed constraints of design and how they impinged upon the choice of assessment for a particular module. Nearly all of the interviewees cited large classes, workloads and limited staff resources as factors that affected their choice of assessment (63 and 49 survey respondents also cited class size and workload respectively) and this was why they appeared to be considering the assessment first, even although what they were actually and initially considering were the logistics of the task. Three-quarters of interviewees gave the impression that this approach was inevitable under the circumstances, whilst others suggested that this strategy didn't make them feel comfortable. A few interviewees said that they were increasingly drawn to the idea that students could be involved in the assessment of the module either via peer assessment or by actually being involved in the design or review process themselves. However, there were indications that this approach was considered simply as a way of addressing the above constraints on time and resources and thus reducing the staff workload, rather than being nurtured as an emerging good practice.

The design of the assessment was also seen to be influenced by student skill sets, student feedback and the different kinds of knowledge that employers wanted students and graduates to have. Bearing in mind the changing context of higher education and the educational backgrounds of students, almost half of the interviewees said that they took this into account when thinking about the assessment, and this is an important insight into the practice of design and review. In addition, two interviewees spoke about how their experience of assessment design was, in their view, being changed specifically to increase the pass rate. The suggestion was that this was a top-down institutional approach to assessment.

Whilst the choice of assessment was in the main an individual activity, team or collaborative assessment design was experienced by about 40% of interviewees, particularly where the method of assessment had to be considered alongside the others in the programme. Responses suggested that module to programme alignment (and vice versa) was an important and necessary collaborative part of the design process.

7.3 Theoretical implications

The significances of the above syntheses (in respect to the research questions) and how they both influence and contribute to existing theory and application knowledge will now be considered.

To re-cap on what has been presented in Chapters 2 and 3, Bamber et al., (2009) in their discussion of socio-cultural theory, focus on:

1. University personnel interactions, the development of meanings, values, attitudes and practices;
2. The use of artefacts and tools which influence the above;
3. The language used in conversation and writing, which is mediated by social forces and structures;
4. That individual identity or subjectivity is both shaped by social contexts and people's interactions at work.

5. The historical contexts of individuals, groups and the institution and their impact on initiatives.

Chapter 5 presented the findings of the questionnaire data and this suggested that in respect of the social interactions and structures, the tools used in design, the individual identities and individual, group or institutional influences do impact upon practice as suggested by Bamber et al. (2009). However, this project also found that these influences were not fixed (the work by Bamber et al. did not suggest that they were), and that they vary according to one's personal context at any given time. When looking at both the survey and interview data concerning factors such as workload, disposable time and institutional practice, respondents showed recurrent traits such as wanting to maintain student interest and engagement with their module(s) or possessing a negative view of the institutional module validation process. These common traits could identify participants as belonging to a particular group (Burr 2003), community of practice (Wenger 2014), or work group (a term employed by both Trowler (2009) and Mathieson (2012) and which are discussed in Chapter 6. However, there was also evidence of academic autonomy whereby interviewees stated that they wouldn't do something even if they were told to or were expected to. The data also suggested that respondents used contradictory approaches to the design of the assessment and had mixed views concerning the usefulness of involving students in the design process. Thus the findings are consistent with the suggestions made by Shaw and Jackson (2002) and Mathieson (2012, p.562) that the views held by supposedly shared communities or work groups could also be questioned by the individual staff within them (ibid. p.562).

Yet there was also evidence of consistency within the community, particularly when respondents wished to review the design of a module but decided not to go through with it, and also when academics felt dissatisfied with the quality of the work that they were producing.

The literature review highlighted that there are other factors which are considered to be influential upon module design which include learners

outcomes and needs, the requirements of professional bodies/future employers, other programmes and modules, the market and available resources (Beetham 2009). Chapter 6 has discussed how these factors were evident in the master themes that emerged during the analysis of the data.

In addition, Anderson has identified *"five factors, namely policy, local context, societal expectations, research trends and technology, which have major influence ..."* (2011, p.71). These traits were also considerably evident in both the questionnaire responses and the interviews, and they suggest that whilst socio-cultural theory does impact on the experiences of module design practice, and can to some extent explain some aspects of module design and review, it does not influence the practice of it in isolation to everything else. This is because socio-cultural theory does not create or shape phenomenon. If socio-cultural theory did not exist, these things would still happen, but they could be differently explained.

However, there was also an overwhelming sense that interviewees really cared about student needs, their employability, and the content of the modules which is what the university of focus cares about too.

7.4 Implications for practice

We now return to the comments made in Chapters 1 and 2 (Beetham 2009, Barnett and Coate 2005) which suggested that universities are having to review their curricula in times of social and economic change.

Evidence from several studies, including the JISC projects, Mathieson (2012) and now this thesis, points to the fact that, as Barnett and Coate (2005) suggest, the experiences and practice of module design is not necessarily fixed, prescriptive or consistent. Rather it is fuzzy and/or abstract. Indeed this study has used empirical findings to demonstrate that experiences of module design do not tightly adhere to the teachings of educational developers and curriculum theorists. Module designers respond to the task according to a number of drivers, and whilst these are not always positive responses, they are reactions to the personal, institutional and economic context at the given

time. As Bamber et al. (2009) suggest, the experiences and constructions of curricular enhancement and review are unique and particular to those working in higher education and are similar to a number of traits associated with socio-cultural theory.

It has already been highlighted that this study found that the practice of module design and review is situation-informed rather than evidence-informed or theory-informed. Academics are locked into addressing the needs of a situation, rather than drawing on published evidence or theory as to effect educational practice.

The study also highlighted that many academics, in their experience, are designing (and sometimes delivering) curricula for which they have little or no subject knowledge of, and this is something that causes dissatisfaction.

The findings of this study have implications for higher education institutions, academics and leaders of institutional in-house courses on module and curriculum design. There is sufficient depth in the data to raise the point that institutional module and course appraisal practices are limited, and restraining, and by the verbal accounts of the interviewees are to some extent self-defeating.

7.5 Limitations of study and recommendations for future research

The limitations of the study have already been outlined in Chapter 4 ('The Methodology'). One of these was the issue that the experiences of module design were only explored in one UK university. However, this project was executed by an insider researcher whose experiences and inside knowledge of the university enabled the project to run smoothly. In addition, access to the respondents was not difficult, and the data was easily forthcoming. As an initial investigation into the phenomenon of module design and review, the project addressed the research questions and revealed personal experiences and practices that were operating at that time. Nevertheless, and as previously discussed, it is not known how far these experiences and practices can be extended to UK higher education institutions as a whole.

The scale of the experiences of module design and review is extensive and multi-faceted even when one examines a single institution of higher education. To generate a further discussion of how identifiable drivers impact on the experiences of module design (particularly when universities are experiencing economic pressures and a more diverse student population than ever before) there is a need for more case studies at the national level to allow further assessment of the phenomenon. Employing the following points as future research strategies could assist in the successful accomplishment of this goal:

1. It would be worthwhile interviewing staff in order to look at themes that were hinted at but not over-riding in the findings of this research. These would include how some conveyed pressures or constraints actually inspired more creative approaches to design and review. Interviewees were not afraid to tell it how it really is. Such themes might become more apparent if alternative questions were employed or if different interview approaches were adopted. For example, using unstructured interview techniques rather than the semi-structured approach employed in this project might reveal further insights around the more positive strategies adopted to cope with time pressures, limited staff resources, the academic abilities of students and teaching subjects which are unfamiliar to the tutor.

2. There was little evidence to suggest that the experiences of module design and review (as explored in the context of this project) varied between academic disciplines. Whilst the role and importance of external practitioners and certain professional validating bodies was more important to those who taught professional modules and courses, this was to be expected. Nevertheless, there is scope to investigate further if experiences of module design and redesign can vary. Thus a cross-disciplinary study could be something to explore in the future.

7.6 Evaluating the overall contribution of this thesis to the field

Much of the findings of this project support the theoretical work by Bamber et al. (2009), such as the development of *"values, attitudes and practices"* which are unique to higher education, the use of tools and artefacts, language or "*forms of talk and writing"* that express the reality of higher education, the effect of the social interactions at play and the historical contexts. However, the results also revealed that a number of module designers prefer to work individually. In addition, and for a few interviewees, the constraints that they experienced prompted them to adopt responsive and pragmatic decisions that did not always sit well with their consciences.

The data also generally sat well with the findings of other studies in that it supported most of what has already been found. However, as with the findings associated with the theory, the data did provide some contradictory insights concerning the design of assessment, the value of the institutional approval procedures and the usefulness of involving students in the design process. In addition, the project uncovered some experiences of module design and review which were not expected, such as observations of passing students. There was also an overwhelming sense that interviewees really cared about student needs, their employability skills and the content of the modules. The vast majority of interviewees went out of their way to do this part of their job in the best way that they could.

Importantly, this research revealed a number of significant findings in respect to how academics design and review their modules and why they do it that way. First, there was trend towards loosely writing the module descriptor document. This was a driver of design particularly in respect of reduced or limited staff resources. Second, pragmatic considerations outweigh theoretically and educationally evidence-informed approaches to design. Third, a number of staff said that luck rather than design played an important role. Fourth, the design of the assessment is influenced by student skill-sets and the educational background of students.

In addition, the changing profile of students entering higher education and the marketization and future-proofing of degree programmes (and the modules within them) is feeding the continuing evolution of the perceived roles of academics. In the university studied in this research, there are increasing workloads and a move away from a personal portfolio of modules associated with one’s research. But there is also evidence of academic practice that enables and encourages students to achieve and acquire the skills required in the workplace.

Based on reasoning, and the findings of the quantitative and qualitative data, the overall essence of this study is that people's module design and review practice is executed in the personal, social and institutional context of a particular point in time. Whilst people's histories, identities and principles are capable of being kept intact, module designers respond to drivers (which can have both a positive and negative impact on the design process) pragmatically, even when what they have considered to be the rights and wrongs concerning the quality of design are threatened. However, there is no doubt that wanting to do the best for students is a common thread which, like the words written in a stick of rock, runs through people's practice of design and review, and this could be clearly evidenced by the interview and questionnaire data. However, wanting to do the best for students isn't the same as doing the best for students. Academics may have their own ideas of what is best, but their version of what is best may not be right.

Overall, the questionnaire survey and qualitative interviews produced a substantial amount of rich data. Some of it can be linked to existing published research, but elements of it also challenged the findings of other studies by providing some contradictory insights.

In these respects the research has advanced our understanding of the experiences of module design and review by both affirming and offering new insights into the existing body of knowledge associated with this field of study.

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Appendix 1: The questionnaire survey

Carole Binns (lead supervisor = Prof. Peter Hartley)

Project title:

Developing Assessment-Led Curriculum Design in a Changing Higher Education Context

Questionnaire

To be administered ‘on-line’ (an initial piloting exercise suggested that it can be completed in 5–6 minutes and very comfortably within ten minutes)

1. **Please tick the box that most describes your position at the University:**

   ☐ Professor
   ☐ Lecturer/Senior Lecturer
   ☐ Academic related
   ☐ Administrative
   ☐ Graduate Teaching Assistant
   ☐ Hourly-paid teacher (Associate Lecturer)
   ☐ Research Staff
   ☐ Other (please state)

   ……..……

2. **Do you act as a:**

   Course or Programme Leader? yes ☐ no ☐

3. **Do you act as a:**

   Module Leader? Yes ☐ No ☐

4. **How many modules are you teaching this academic year?**

   ☐ 0
   ☐ 1-2
   ☐ 3-4
   ☐ 5-6
   ☐ 7+

5. **Have you ever had any involvement in module design in Higher Education?**

   ☐ Yes ☐ No

   If you have answered 'no' please go to question 16.

6. **Would you rate your experience in module design as:**

   ☐ very experienced
   ☐ quite experienced
   ☐ a novice

7. **Do you have any experience of designing a new module from scratch? This means that there was no existing module descriptor in place, and that the module had never been taught by anyone else before. Tick all that apply.**

   ☐ Yes, by myself
   ☐ Yes, in collaboration with other people
   ☐ No

8. **Do you have any experience of 'reviewing and/or adjusting an existing module? This means that a module descriptor was already in place, the module had been taught before, and that you had to 'tweak' or amend it.**

   ☐ Yes ☐ No

9. **Is your practice of 'module design' influenced by (tick all that apply):**

   ☐ Professional Courses (e.g. PGC(HE) or PGCert)
   ☐ In-house training seminars and / or workshops
   ☐ External events, such as Conferences or seminars
   ☐ Your subject area
   ☐ Your subject pedagogy
   ☐ Your own experiences of Higher Education
   ☐ Established practice within your own School or Team
   ☐ Other (please state)

10. **Think of your most recent experience: when you are designing curricula do you use any of the following 'aids' to help you? Tick up to 3 that are the most important to you.**

    ☐ Models of curriculum design (for example 'constructive alignment' or 'threshold concepts')
    ☐ The module descriptor template guidance notes
    ☐ Discussions with departmental or School colleagues

- ☐ Discussions with educational developers or learning technologists
- ☐ Team meetings
- ☐ ‘How-to-do-it’ curriculum design books
- ☐ The internet
- ☐ Workshops
- ☐ Nothing
- ☐ Other (please state)

11. **Only answer this question if you have experience of writing a new module. Using your most recent experience – whereabouts on the module descriptor template do you start?**
    - ☐ I start at the beginning and work my way through in the order of the template
    - ☐ I start at the beginning and work my way through in no particular order
    - ☐ I start at a convenient point for me
    - ☐ Other (please state)

12. **When you are designing a module do you look at other module descriptors within the programme to see if there is no duplication of curricula?**
    - ☐ Yes ☐ No

13. **At what point do you plan the assessment when thinking about planning a new or revising an existing module?**
    - ☐ beginning
    - ☐ end
    - ☐ it’s something that I return to throughout the process

14. **Using your most recent experiences, which of the following factors do you take into account when you think about the type of assessment that you will use for your module?**

- ☐ Class size
- ☐ Your workload
- ☐ Transferable skills
- ☐ Subject benchmarks
- ☐ Conventional practice
- ☐ Institutional practice
- ☐ What an employer would want to see
- ☐ Professional Validating Bodies
- ☐ Assessments already used in the programme
- ☐ Student feedback
- ☐ Other (please state)

15. Have you ever wanted to change the design of a module, but did not go through with it?

- ☐ No (go to question 16)
- ☐ Yes

15a. If you can remember, what stopped you making the change? (Tick all that apply)

- ☐ Reaction from colleagues
- ☐ Reaction from Course Leader/Programme Director
- ☐ School or Faculty procedures
- ☐ University regulations
- ☐ Limited resources
- ☐ Other (please state)

16. Do you have any teaching or teaching related qualifications that included some level of teaching or training about curriculum design? (For example a PGCE, PGC(HE) or a teaching certificate)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

17. **For how many years (if any) have you been teaching in Higher Education?**

☐ years

18. **Would you be prepared to participate in a 'follow-up' and face-to-face interview based on your responses to the questionnaire? This would last no longer than one hour and an indication of willingness is all that is needed at this stage. Anonymity will be assured. You will be contacted my email within six weeks of submitting this questionnaire if you tick 'yes'.**

☐ Yes

☐ No

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire

Appendix 2: The invitation to complete the survey

Dear Colleague,

'Developing Assessment-Led Curriculum Design in a Changing Higher Education Context'

I am conducting a small-scale piece of research to discover if assessment-led module design can be effectively used in Higher Education. Initially, the project will also attempt to uncover the nature of existing module design practice. One of the questions it will be asking is *"do our academics employ the systematic and consistent approaches recommended by educational developers and theorists or are there other processes involved?"* The topic is very much under-researched, and this project will be included in a PhD thesis. The research is self-funded and I am asking you to be involved as you are employed at the University of Bradford. Ethics approval was granted by the Humanities, Social and Health Sciences Research Panel at the University of Bradford on 29 May 2012.

Your participation would involve completing a short e-questionnaire survey. The pilot survey suggested that the questionnaire takes 6 minutes (or less) to complete. This is attached to this email and can be opened by clicking on: https://www.surveys.bradford.ac.uk/curriculum1/

The survey will be open until Sunday 15 July 2012.

Participation is entirely voluntary and you do not have to answer all of the questions if you do not want to. At the end of the questionnaire, you will be invited to take part in a follow-up interview, but you do not have to express an interest.

The data obtained from the questionnaire will be accessed and viewed by myself but it is automatically aggregated and analysed by the e-survey

programme that has been employed for this project. Anonymity is therefore assured. Thus, if you volunteer to be interviewed, **you will need to state your email address at the end** so that I can contact you. This information will be isolated from the aggregated data and viewed (by myself) as a single list of email addresses.

Data will be held on the University system for ten years and will be kept and destroyed as dictated by the University Good Research Practice Standards. The aggregated data is likely to be published in a journal paper, and therefore if you wish to discuss any aspects of the study, please do not hesitate to contact me, or one of the project supervisors.

I very much hope that you will feel able to participate. May I thank you, in advance, for your valuable co-operation.

Yours sincerely,

Carole Binns c.l.binns@bradford.ac.uk

Project supervisors:

Professor Peter Hartley (lead) p.hartley@bradford.ac.uk **and**

Mr. Peter Hughes p.hughes3@bradford.ac.uk

Appendix 3: The ‘thank you’ posting to staff

A big thank you to academic and academic-related staff

Can I thank all of you who completed the online survey which asked about your experiences of module design.

Thank you also to everyone who expressed an initial interest in participating in a 'follow-up interview'. I will be contacting you with further details for you to consider. Some people did express an interest - but unfortunately did not leave their email address. If you think that could apply to you, please could you email me at c.l.binns@bradford.ac.uk and I will make contact with you.

With my best wishes, Carole Binns

Appendix 4: The follow-up information for interviewees

Your initial interest in participating in a follow-up interview following an e-survey

Dear (insert name),

With the onset of the new academic year, the interviews for this project have now commenced. As promised I have sent you a copy of the interview schedule (attached). It does not matter if you cannot remember your responses to the questionnaire.

I have also sent you some suggested dates for interview. Theses are not fixed in stone, and therefore if they are not convenient, please let me know and I try my best to accommodate your request.

The interview will be semi-structured. The questions are being used to further explore and identify the different types of experience and practice in curriculum and module design.

As mentioned in my previous email, if you consent to being interviewed, you will be interviewed only once. The interview will not be longer than one hour and it will take place on university premises at a location that suits you. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded and I might write a few comments as the interview progresses. However, and if you prefer, I can write notes only. I have also attached a copy of the consent form that you will be asked to sign just before the interview commences.

If you are still happy to participate, here are some dates for you to consider:

Please can email me stating:

your chosen preferred date and time;

one alternative date and time;

the location of where you would like to be interviewed. This could be in my office (Richmond E33), your office, or at an alternative location within the University (I am happy to arrange this).

I will confirm the date, time and location of the interview within one week of hearing from you.

If you no longer wish to take part in the project, please could you let me know by return of email, and I will not contact you again.

As mentioned previously, Professor Peter Hartley and Peter Hughes are supervising the project and they can be contacted at p.hartley@bradford.ac.uk and p.hughes3@bradford.ac.uk should you have any questions. You may, of course, contact me at any time.

Thank you once again and best wishes, Carole

Appendix 5: The email to prospective interviewees

Your initial interest in participating in a follow-up interview following an e-survey

'Developing Assessment-Led Curriculum Design in a Changing Higher Education Context'

Dear (insert name),

With the onset of the new academic year, the interviews for this project have now commenced. As promised I have sent you a copy of the interview schedule (attached) and some suggested dates for interview. The latter are not fixed in stone, and therefore if they are not convenient, please let me know and I try my best to accommodate your request.

The interview will be semi-structured. The questions are being used to further explore and identify the different types of experience and practice in curriculum and module design.

As mentioned in my previous email, if you consent to being interviewed, you will be interviewed only once. The interview will not be longer than one hour and it will take place on university premises at a location that suits you. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded and I might write a few comments as the interview progresses. However, and if you prefer, I can write notes only. I have also attached a copy of the consent form that you will be asked to sign just before the interview commences.

If you are still happy to participate, here are some dates for you to consider:

Please can you email me stating:

your chosen preferred date and time;

one alternative date and time;

the location of where you would like to be interviewed. This could be in my office (Richmond E33), your office, or at an alternative location within the University (I am happy to arrange this).

I will confirm the date, time and location of the interview within one week of hearing from you.

If you no longer wish to take part in the project, please could you let me know by return of email, and I will not contact you again.

As mentioned previously, Professor Peter Hartley and Peter Hughes are supervising the project and they can be contacted at p.hartley@bradford.ac.uk and p.hughes3@bradford.ac.uk should you have any questions. You may, of course, contact me at any time.

Thank you once again and best wishes, Carole

Appendix 6: The informed consent letter

‘Informed Consent’ - For each interviewee to read and sign

My name is Carole Binns. I am doing research on a project entitled ‘Developing Assessment-Led Curriculum Design in a Changing Higher Education Context.’ The project is self-funded, although as a University employee, my PhD fees have been waived. Professor Peter Hartley and Mr. Peter Hughes are supervising the project and they can be contacted at p.hartley@bradford.ac.uk and p.hughes3@bradford.ac.uk should you have any questions. The purpose of the interview is to further explore and identify the different types of experience and practice in module design.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the project. Before we start, I would like to emphasize that:

Your participation is entirely voluntary;

You are free to refuse to answer any questions;

You are free to withdraw from the project at any time.

The data obtained from the interview will be kept strictly confidential and will only be available to members of the research team. It will be identified by a number and not by your name.

The interview data will be included the final thesis and any published journal articles. However, under no circumstances will your name or Department / School be included in the thesis or any publication. Measures will be taken to prevent data being linked with specific respondents. I will not include any anonymous quotations from your interview unless you have given your consent to do so.

The data obtained from the interview will be accessed and analysed by myself and by using Nvivo. It will also be transcribed by me. The data will be

held on the University system for ten years and will be kept and destroyed as dictated by the University Good Research Practice Standards.

Please sign here to show that you have read this document and that you consent to being interviewed:

……. (signed)

……. (printed)

Please sign here to show that you consent to anonymous quotations being included in the thesis and any other publication:

……. (signed)

……. (printed)

Appendix 7: The example of a coded interview transcript

Transcript (3), Interviewed 28 September 2012 (41.00 minutes)

Q1. Role in the University (this answer is not verbatim to preserve anonymity): A full-time lecturer on a professional vocational programme. Teaches five modules. Is solely responsible for four of these modules, with shared responsibility for one. Is a personal tutor for Masters level students. Involved in placement visits. A member of a placement evaluation panel. Also involved in admissions. Research active ("supposed to be" – *interviewee's opinion*). Been here for four years, previously in practice.

Main question: Think of a module that you've designed or reviewed recently – can you talk through your process of design with me? Yeah, I design curricula for all of them. Two of the modules, they're the same module, but taught to undergraduates and postgraduates and I designed and submitted the module descriptor for those two modules. For the XX module for the first years, I didn't design that, I've inherited it from someone else, but I've re-organised it. I've totally changed it really, and that's a linked module over two semesters. Most recent one was this time last year, where I taught XX, I inherited that from someone else and I reviewed what was being taught already, because I've done the PGCHEP, although I winged all the way through that course, I recognised that I actually benefited quite a lot from that, so I was mindful of the discussions of the map that we used to design a course, and was mindful of the things that we needed to practical wise and so also I was mindful of the feedback that we get from the employers in XX about the difficulties that they experience with the students and what skills they lack, and I was also mindful – you see with XX (*the profession*) we have to conform with XX reform board meeting, and after the death of XX, we received a huge hammering, some of it justified, for our practice. There's been a review of XX the profession and education so I was very mindful of

that as well, so I went through all, the basic introductory texts as well. I was starting from the skills, rather than the actual knowledge base, so I looked at the skills that a student needs to be able to help them to develop the knowledge for them to be a XX *(profession*), so the first semester I concentrate on them developing reflective skills, understanding of professionalism and the barriers of critical reflection, so that is what to concentrate on, and so I give them some kind of formative assessment and at the end of the semester we look at theory, we apply that practice.

Additional question: Was that thought process something that was unique to that module because of what was happening in the media at that time or was that approach something that you consistently apply? Well I think it followed on from, it must have been three years ago now, that I designed the adult modules XX with adults, cos I looked at the skills required, so *(pause)* well about four years ago someone called XX produced an article for XX (profession) and she used three interrelated circles of knowledge base, skills base and theory and because I was new to lecturing that influenced me quite a lot actually, that informed how I structured those modules and what information I put in, so from a very practical point of view, for the XX modules what I do is take it from what happens when an adult rings someone who is in XX *(a certain situation)* – what is the process that the XX goes through? So I go through that process with them and within that we look at specific theory and issues that related to that. (overlap)

Additional question: Can you tell me if you use any other aids to help you? Oh yeah, I have conversations with people, I debate things with people, on the PGCHEP we were given 'The Lecturers Toolkit' *(a book)* and I found that useful to help me to design a session and that introduced me to the concept of buzz groups which I was doing anyway but that gave a label to it and gave a structure so that was useful and the discussions that we had around settling student s problems and solving problems that was useful and it made me think about what they were doing and how I got information across to them and was getting good feedback from the students about actually being part of it. (overlap)

Additional question: Have you have ever been in a situation where you've been asked to change a module descriptor by your line manager and you've been asked to do it say, on a Friday and to hand it on their desk on Monday? No, but I have been in a situation where I was walking down a corridor and on a Friday night and someone from admin saying that they were designing a new degree and they needed a module descriptor to be submitted for Monday morning and no-one was around, and whilst the subject was not alien to me, it was not my subject, and I just went off into my room and wrote it! *(Laugh).* (overlap) **Additional question: That's very interesting, because what I would like to know is whether your process for doing that was completely different to your own modules.** I guess that what I had to do was google the subject to see what issues there were and yes I did look at the skills base again, what kind of skills did people need for them to develop their knowledge, and I don't think it has changed massively, so yeah, I think I still followed my structure really, and if I was asked to do it to create another descriptor for care then I'd follow the same process, cos I think for me it's worked. (overlap)

Main question: When you are designing your modules, what are you trying to achieve? I want, well XX's *(profession)* who are skilled and knowledgeable and interested in the subject at the end of it and I guess that I'm looking for a bit of passion because my experience of formal education was very disjointed, it wasn't that positive, so by the time I came to higher education I'd been working in full-time employment, so I was about 30 by the time I got to HE so it opened up doors for me that I'd never had access to before so when I'm meeting new students I want the same to happen to them, so I want them to be enthused, because I have quite firm political beliefs as well, in terms of social justice and quite a few of the things that happen in XX, such as *(deleted – identifying circs)* such as *(deleted – identifying circs)*, they're things that XX's can do something about and the way the system has developed in XX (profession). XX is seen not to have that political, they don't see those issues as being political , they just see it as

work, whereas I don't you see, and I'm trying to instil that in my students. (overlap)

Additional question: Do you find that once you are teaching the module, issues are thrown up that change … Oh yeah, all the time, cos something I miss, like an issue, or a text, I'll forget that I haven't put in a text because I forgot about it or something new comes along. The thing with XX (profession) at the moment is that we have a coalition government, and we have a new government so we have new procedures and policy that are coming in as well, so I am constantly having to change and review all that. So there's lots of change going along, so I have to change cos I've been setting formative assignments, (overlap) I'm in touch with what students are writing and how they're developing their thought processes, I've had to adapt to those needs as well.

Main question: Which audiences do you have in mind for the documents that you might produce? The students and future employers very much because I feel I get hammered by XX *(place)* employers a lot, (overlap) for example there is a philosophy of case provision at the moment called personalisation and within that there is a concept of service users being more responsible, they're actually offered the opportunity to do self assessment, a whole new discussion, a whole new skills area and I've been discussing that with students. But in the meantime XX *(professional bodies)* have been getting involved, and so there's been legal changes, XX *(employer)* have been getting involved and so there's been legal changes. XX *(employer)* interpret self assessment as abdicating their responsibilities resulting in legal challenges so workers with XX *(employer)* workers say about self-assessment “no we don't do that!”. They don't have that type of concept and philosophy of what we do here because of the threat of legal challenge and so then I'm criticized for teaching the wrong things somehow and so I get a bit paranoid about it, but I am really concerned about how students take what we are talking about into the workplace because (a) the students may not be talking about issues in a constructive way, but also, because in the workplace they're really, really stressed, they can't think

laterally, they just think with a very narrow focus. So I'm constantly thinking about that. How I really have to keep checking what the students understand, what I've discussed. When you think about it, it should be good practice of teaching, but that kind of re-inforced for me that I have to keep checking what they understand.

Additional question: Tell me, how much does the student body impact on your module design? I guess it's around the results at the end really, about the discussions that students go into in their essays and just how involved they are in the sessions and the feedback I get. It's always quite minimal the feedback, on e-vision and the people who do feedback give quite a lot of information but there's not that many that go on and do that. So I do read that, and I do take it seriously and I do adapt things and usually I get really good feedback on the case studies that I put into practice in the sessions and I really try to do that as much as I can because that's the thing that gets people going (laughs).

Main question: What do you see as the pressures that influence or affect the way that you design a module? I feel that I'm under pressure from the employer for reasons that I have already discussed. I'm under pressure because I only get to see them once a week and I only see a large group. I mean this is about workload for me but the best sessions I've had the best outcomes I've had is when I've spent a long time with them … (overlap) *(un-transcribed sentences that describe the confidential personal details of a student and why they had to have a one-one-session)*. What happened was that he did so well in the second assessment that he didn't have to resit because he reflected on his experience after Christmas, how it impacted on his work, how the theory helped him understand … (*un-transcribed student personal details*) it was great it was amazing and if we hadn't had that one-to-one time we couldn't have done that to each other we just don't get the time to do that with every student, we should have that session really and we don't. There's 74 in that cohort, and I did two solid days of group tutorials and I know that my boss would say 'what you doing spending all these days on that can't you spend the time doing other things'

and I say I can't because *(pause)* 'Oh well you're doing too much but it's like *(pause)* I had to (overlap) *(pause)* you know when you think about the differences between the services students get from Uni and if they went to somewhere like Oxford *(pause)* in Oxford they get the time to spend having sherry with really intelligent Dons and that. I mean I know they've got the privilege and the connection but just spending that time is amazing and they don't get that in these universities. It's almost like the Aldi of universities (laughs) you don't get your wide aisles you don't get your choice you don't get the attention and it's almost like if I go outside of this room and say that we need to be doing more tutorials I'd be shot! *(laugh)* Cos people like with workloads, there's so much pressure to do research, to get research money in. So I know that there's lots of pressure but at the end of the day you can't stop *(pause)* it's supposed to be an educational establishment and I think that is really important. Sometimes I think that I should have gone to XX College that's what they do, so that's where my passion lies more really, but I am interested in the research, but I just think that (pause) you know if I was a parent and if I was having to pay for my son or daughter I'd think I'd think about that, consider, the questions that I'd ask – what attention they'd get, how big the lectures.

Variant of main question: You said that doing the PGCHEP has been useful to you in module and course design … Well it actually made me think about it, I had to read about it, I had to do an essay on it. Do you know, writing the summative essay that we had to write I absolutely was really resistant to writing about formative assignments. Essentially for me if I write that it's important that means I have to do it, and at that point I couldn't cope with thought about giving people feedback on a formative assignment as well as everything else I had to do. Now, they can't have a semester without a formative assessment! *(laugh)* It made me read, research what other people's viewpoints are and think about it and because of the class situation I get to hear what other people are doing and the ideas from them. The people that we've met, the contacts like X and I – we're friends now and we would never have got to meet each other if it hadn't had been for that course and

we've done favours for each other that we'd never had got to do if it hadn't been for that course. If they'd done that course on-line I wouldn't have got the same out of it, it made me search and evaluate other literature that I wouldn't have done otherwise cos I have other priorities. You do what you have to do don't you? If you've got to write a 4,000 word essay or something, you've got to read and evaluate the information about that to answer the question. If I was doing some reading online, |I don't think it's the same *(pause)* it wouldn't challenge me, engage me the same way. Connect that question to a specific service user group so there's more information, so they've got to look further afield. *(untranscribed identifying sentence)* I'm restricted by my lack of imagination

(laugh) as well, cos I can't think of anything else to do, and I can't see the point of an exam. I could get them to do a series of reports, but that would be so intense, and intensive on me that I couldn't carry on doing it to be honest. I structure the questions as best I can to get them thinking as deeply as I can about a subject, but I know that …. (overlap) *(sentence unfinished by interviewee)*.

Main question: At what point in the design process to you consider the form of assessment that you will use? I think I've got the assessment part of the descriptor, I've got that in mind from the very beginning. (overlap) I guess what I'm ashamed of is that I design the assessment around my workload and what I can cope with, rather than what could be best for the module and I admit to that. I think that there are better things like an assessment process that we can follow that I just don't have the capacity to do. I don't have the capacity at the moment and I don't have the skills. (overlap and overlap) **Additional question: Is this something that has changed over time, or has it always been this way?** I think this has been from day one. Some people use assessments that are very narrow (like a core plan), whereas I make them write a 3 or 4000 word essay. They've got to be on a specific question, and they've got to connect that question to a specific service user group so there's more information, so they've got to look further afield … *(un-transcribed identifying words)* I'm restricted by my lack of

imagination (laugh) as well, co I can't think of anything else to do, and I can't see the point of doing an exam. I could get them to do a series of reports, but that would be so intense and intensive on me that I couldn't carry on to be honest. I structure the questions as best I can to get them thinking as deeply as I can about a subject, but I know that … (overlap)*(long pause)*

Main question: How important are your relationships with fellow academics, professionals and students when designing curricula? With colleagues, well erm, well I feel that I rely on colleagues, cos colleagues here have got more experience than me, so I rely on them to run things past them, to check things out with them. They've usually got something that they can help me with or give me some advice on, so that's really important. I like having a bit of a conversation with students about how I design things and what I'm including cos they do give some views like when I asked them about doing some writing skills and they said that they already do that somewhere else. Like that wasn't necessary and so I've dumped that this year and what they said was that another session was really good, but they wished that they had more time, so what I've done is to stretch that session, it's a critical analysis session, and so I do that over two weeks instead of one session, so that's really helpful and having those conversations. I don't really socialize with people from here, X I do, not loads, I don't really, I kind of feel I don't fit in here anyway, so I don't socialize with anyone here. But having a good friendly atmosphere is really important and getting on with people is important to me. Having a respectful atmosphere is important, and I like to feel I can trust people as well. I like to feel safe.**(overlap)**

Main question: Are there any issues in module design which you would like to mention which we have not mentioned so far? Well this might be naïve but I feel like when I'm given a module curricula to design I'm just left to get on with it. If I was told to do it any other way I'd resist but what I can't believe is that we do it in such isolation *(expresses amazement)*. We never all really come together and ... *(pause)* we don't seem to do that at all which I find a bit shocking. I try to mention it to people but I don't seem to get anywhere with it. It just seems to be a bit disjointed and it's kind of like by the

luck of the god or goddess that we don't completely go off tangent really. Although it's a degree course and it's got modules within it, the modules don't seem to come together to connect the modules up. It just seems to be so haphazard. Although I know it's not, the way we all go off *(pause)* I guess I'd like to get together and have a bit more coherent structure, the different types of assessment. In XX *(profession)* we have different types of assessment all the way through it, but it seems to be by accident rather than by design. I'd like to see that a bit more coherent really, a bit more organized. But we just, like (pause) a bit more structure, officialdom to it. **Additional question: Do you know why your team works in that particular way?** I don't know, is that something sort of like the histories of universities and how you don't question people who are all knowing about their subject because it seems (pause) like when I first came, although there was a hierarchy in the university it was quite flat. I mean they're introducing the hierarchy system now, but it was quite flat and I didn't have a manager, a line manager. I had a mentor, so is it because you didn't dare *(pause)* you never questioned anyone deemed to be an expert in the subject *(laugh)* I don't know, I've no idea! There's still terminology, like I don't know how it all works, I don't know the relationship between Senate, the Schools and the Departments. How they all work I don't know.

Appendix 8: The initial themes derived from the first reading of the data

Group 1:

Student/external examiner feedback	Experience in design
Academic autonomy	Time to teach
Knowledge transmission	External bodies
Student pass rate	Security of tenure
Colleague support	Teaching quality
Thinking of assessment	Personal approaches
Co-teaching staff	CART
Being an ex-practitioner	Module teams
Unfamiliar subjects	Employability
PGCHEP	Designing assessment
Design Strategies	Student expectations / skills
Own research	Educational theories
Module alignment	Clarity of documents
Learning outcomes	How well team works together
Holistic v isolated approach	Open minds
External constraints	Level of students
Self development	Working with people don't like
Formal process v instinct driven	Personalities

Formal feedback

Link modules

Workload

Effect of PGCHEP on design

Constraints of resources

Finding new ways of assessing

Staffing levels

Colleagues who won't make changes

Students and design

What is achievable

Finding new ways of teaching

Group 2:

Unfamiliar modules

Going to great lengths

Coping strategies

Student needs

Resources

Role of experience

Considering assessment

Supportive work environment

Why forced to tweak

Role of external examiners

Knowledge of design students

External bodies

Student skill set

Looking at other courses

Designing with students in mind

Designing assessment

Time

Role of PGCHEP

Role of colleagues

Audience for module descriptors

Is it collaborative?

Writing vaguely

Size of class

Designing assessment to pass

Consistent practice

Holistic view of design

University documents	University processes
Level descriptors	Student feedback
Learning outcomes	Professional guidelines
Who is going to teach it	Instinctive v logical approaches
Student involvement	Reading lists
Frequency of reviewing a module	Subject knowledge
Quality assurance descriptors	Order in which write module
Outside pressures on assessment	Ways of writing the assessment
People's opinions	Drafting vaguely
Purpose of module module	Strategies used half way through
Reflection	Staffing
Inexperience	Short-term contract
What we want students to achieve	Thought processes
Deadlines	Budget constraints
Being a student on the PGCHEP	New module design is rare
Role of employability	Is design process clear
Student experience	Recruitment
University view of teaching	Top down pressures on design

Group 3:

Need to change	Don't look at module descriptors

Consistent process	Triggers for change
Bureaucratic exercise	Disconnect between descriptor and reality
Don't design from scratch	Legacy document
Learning outcomes document	Institutional expectations of a
Student handbooks	External bodies
Documents are statements of intent	Teaching doesn't match documents
Documents can be imprecise	Expectation to conform
Transferable skills	Language and rituals
Deadlines	Student engagement
Student feedback	Only give module descriptors a passing consideration
Write generically	Learning outcomes are all the same
Autonomy is a thing of the past	Universities are now shopping malls

Appendix 9: Table of working themes and sub-themes

Constraints	Individual experiences	**Collaborative design**	**Student impact**
Subject knowledge Autonomy Time Class size Institutional processes Resources Quality issues The assessment Student issues	Experience Instincts Personal traits Thought processes/reflection Self-confidence Autonomy	Role of students Role of external examiners Role of external bodies Colleagues Internal bodies CART	Skills base Achievement Expectations Their needs Marketability Employability
Assessment	**Alignment**	**Teaching qualifications**	**Design document**
Creativity Choice Student impact Purpose Class size	Fitting into the programme Levels Flexibility Learning outcomes	PGCHE Educational theories Design models Educational literature Value of doing the course	Module descriptor Language Other documents Flexibility

Appendix 10: Some additional tables of survey data

Table 1: Please tick the box that most describes your position at the University

Position	Number of respondents	%
Professor	5	5.3%
Lecturer/Senior Lecturer	72	74.4%
Academic related	11	11.7%
Administrative	1	1.1%
Graduate Teaching Assistant	1	1.1%
Hourly-paid teacher (associate lecturer)	3	3.2%
Research staff	0	0.0%
Other *(please specify)**	3	3.2%
Total	**96**	**100.0%**

* The description given by the respondents suggested they were from the 'academic-related' mailing list

Table 2: For how many years (if any) have you been teaching in Higher Education?

Number of years	Number of respondents	%
0	1	1.1%
1-2	4	4.2%
2-3	11	11.6%
4-5	7	7.4%
6-7	13	13.8%
8+	50	53.0%
Didn't answer	10	10.6%
Total	96	100.0%

Table 3: Have you ever had any involvement in module design in Higher Education?

Yes	83	86.4%
No	10	10.4%
Didn't answer	3	3.2%
Total	96	100.0%